

SCORP

The Statewide Comprehensive
Outdoor Recreation Plan for Missouri

2026-2031

Show Me Missouri Outdoors



Missouri State Parks - a division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources





Mike Kehoe

GOVERNOR
STATE OF MISSOURI

Dear Fellow Missourians:

I am pleased to present the *2026-2031 Show Me Missouri Outdoors Plan*. The *Show Me* plan is the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, or SCORP, for Missouri. The purpose of the plan is to identify outdoor recreation issues of statewide significance and evaluate the supply and demand of public outdoor recreation resources in the state. The plan also provides guidance for future development and expansion of outdoor recreation opportunities in Missouri. This five-year planning document meets Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant requirements and ensures that Missouri remains eligible for federal outdoor recreation project funding.

The process for soliciting public input for the *2026-2031 Show Me Missouri Outdoors Plan* was a multi-faceted approach to engage two key stakeholder groups: park visitors and recreation providers. The plan includes survey results from Missouri residents and outdoor recreation professionals that identify specific recreation needs in Missouri communities. In addition, a SCORP advisory committee composed of federal, state and local public recreation providers, as well as experts in other fields outside of recreation and public land management, came together to help shape the recommendations outlined in the *Show Me* plan.

Using the results from the surveys, as well as the advice and suggestions from the SCORP advisory committee, eight broad goals were identified for enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities in Missouri:

- Expand recreational opportunities that serve the diverse needs of all user types, generations, and communities across Missouri.
- Expand Missouri's trail system and promote trails as essential to active and healthy living.
- Use LWCF grants to modernize facilities, enhance security, and support long-term project sustainability.
- Connect youth to the outdoors through environmental education, stewardship, and hands-on learning.
- Promote the health and community benefits of the outdoors through partnerships, messaging, and programming.
- Promote conservation and stewardship of natural and cultural resources within recreation areas.
- Build provider capacity through funding, staffing, and workforce development to support sustainable outdoor recreation.
- Continue data collection, research efforts, and spatial analysis to identify areas of greatest recreation need.

It is my hope that the information presented within this plan will provide assistance and guidance as we work together to protect, improve, and expand the Show-Me State's tremendous outdoor opportunities.

Sincerely,

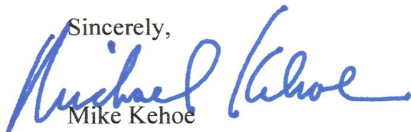

Mike Kehoe
Governor

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

- **ADA** – Americans with Disabilities Act
- **BCNS** - Boone County Nature School
- **CDC** – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- **CFM** – Conservation Federation of Missouri
- **COA** – Conservation Opportunity Area
- **DESE** – Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- **DHSS** – Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
- **DNS** – Discover Nature Schools
- **ESIP** – Eat Smart in Parks
- **GIS** – Geographic Information Systems
- **FAST** – Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act
- **LWCF** – Land and Water Conservation Fund
- **MDC** – Missouri Department of Conservation
- **MSP** – Missouri State Parks
- **MoDNR** – Missouri Department of Natural Resources
- **MoNASP** – Missouri National Archery in Schools Program
- **MoCAN** – Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition
- **MPA** – Missouri Park Association
- **MPRA** – Missouri Parks and Recreation Association
- **MTAB** – Missouri Trails Advisory Board
- **NAMI** – National Alliance on Mental Illness
- **NEEF** – National Environmental Education Foundation
- **NPS** – National Park Service
- **NRPA** – National Recreation and Park Association
- **OCS** – Outer Continental Shelf
- **RTP** – Recreational Trails Program
- **SAMHSA** – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- **SCORP** – Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- **SNR** – School of Natural Resources
- **TPL** – Trust for Public Land
- **UPOP** – Urban Populations Outreach Program
- **USACE** – United States Army Corps of Engineers
- **USDA** – United States Department of Agriculture
- **USFWS** – United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- **USFS** – United States Forest Service

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INTRODUCTION

From neighborhood pocket parks to sprawling county sports complexes, Missouri's outdoor recreation offerings are as diverse as its landscapes. The Show-Me State, as Missouri is affectionately known, is replete with recreational resources. Managing these resources to ensure public access is a complex task, as is the task of making certain these resources are adequately funded for their continued enjoyment by future generations. The *2026-2031 Show Me Missouri Outdoors* plan provides a framework for inventorying the state's recreational resources by assessing public trends and needs, identifying issues that face recreation providers, and identifying gaps in the spectrum of outdoor recreation facilities across the state.

The *2026-2031 Show Me Missouri Outdoors* plan is the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for Missouri. The SCORP is a five-year planning document required by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program. The purpose of the SCORP is to identify outdoor recreation issues of statewide significance and evaluate the supply of and demand for outdoor recreation resources and facilities in the state.

The SCORP provides guidance to state and municipal agencies as they develop and expand outdoor recreation opportunities for their respective constituents and jurisdictions.

As stated in its name, the plan must be comprehensive. According to LWCF requirements, a SCORP is considered comprehensive if it:

- Identifies outdoor recreation issues of statewide importance based on, but not limited to, input from public participation. The plan must also identify those issues that will be addressed through the LWCF grant process and those issues that may be addressed by other means.
- Evaluates demand, i.e., public outdoor recreation preferences.
- Evaluates the supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities in the state.

Additionally, the plan must have an implementation program that identifies Missouri's strategies, priorities, and actions for the obligation of its annual LWCF grant apportionment. The implementation program must be of sufficient detail for use in developing project selection criteria for Missouri's Open Project Selection Process, the process by which potential grant projects

are reviewed and recommended for LWCF funding each year.

History of the LWCF Program

The LWCF was established by the LWCF Act in 1965. The fund launched the LWCF State Assistance Program, which provides 50/50 matching grants to states and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The program is intended to create and maintain a nationwide legacy of high-quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate nonfederal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the United States.

Revenue for the LWCF program is derived from oil and gas leasing in the Outer Continental Shelf. Since its inception, the LWCF has funded more than 46,000 projects nationwide, many of which have been awarded to county and municipal governments to provide close-to-home recreation opportunities.

The Department of the Interior's National Park Service oversees the LWCF State Assistance Program and has delegated administration of the program to each state. In Missouri, the Department of Natural Resources administers the program. Direct oversight of the program is performed by the Division of State Parks. Since the advent of the LWCF State Assistance Program in 1965, MoDNR has granted nearly \$110 million in funding to more than 1,700 projects statewide, with at least one LWCF project to be found in every county in the state. Map 1 on page 3 shows the distribution of LWCF projects statewide and demonstrates the enormity of the impact the grant program has had on the state.

LWCF Stewardship Requirements

The benefits of LWCF extend beyond park and recreation facility construction and open space acquisition. The fund also plays a

major stewardship role. It secures the integrity and recreational quality of fund-assisted parks and conservation lands, now and for future generations. When a LWCF grant is accepted, the project must remain dedicated to public outdoor recreation use in perpetuity. LWCF's most important tool for perpetual stewardship is its "conversion protection" requirement.

This protection requirement is outlined in Section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act and strongly discourages casual discards and conversions of LWCF-funded park and recreation facilities to other uses. Section 6(f)(3) specifically states, "No property acquired or developed with assistance under this section shall, without the approval of the Secretary, be converted to other than public outdoor recreation uses. The Secretary shall approve such conversion only if he finds it to be in accord with the then existing statewide outdoor recreation plan and only upon such conditions as he deems necessary to assure the substitution of other recreation properties of at least equal fair market value and of reasonably equivalent usefulness and location." If a LWCF-assisted park or project is "converted" from its original intent and made no longer available to the public for outdoor recreation, then an equivalent replacement must be provided by the grant recipient.

The conversion protection outlined in Section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act serves as both an opportunity and a challenge for grant recipients, particularly local governments. It protects a park from facilities that are incompatible with outdoor recreation and can assist an agency in fending off undesirable development proposals. Conversely, it can lead to the unintended consequence of a community struggling to financially support a park in perpetuity. This is especially true in smaller communities experiencing declining populations and a shrinking tax base. This

issue will be discussed in more detail in the following pages, along with other issues pertinent to recreation provision within the state.

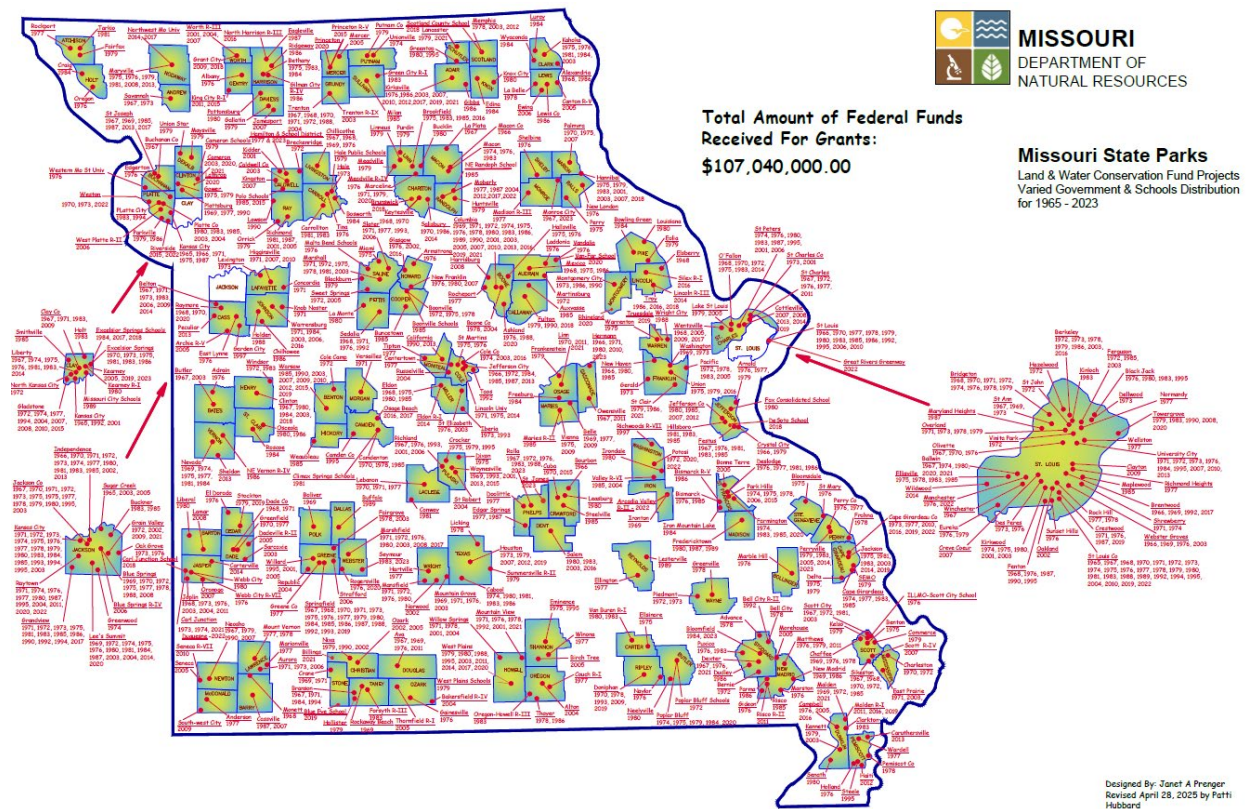
Summary

Over the next several chapters, the 2026-2031 *Show Me Missouri Outdoors* plan will explore issues and trends facing both the state and recreation providers, provide an

assessment of the physical recreation resources that currently exist in Missouri, and discuss key findings from surveys regarding demand for recreation facilities and programs. Using this information, the *Show Me* plan will outline priority areas in which to focus future funding and partnership efforts, to develop a comprehensive statewide roadmap for the future of outdoor recreation in Missouri.

Map 1.

Missouri LWCF Project Sites 1965-2023





RECREATION RESOURCES

Much of Missouri's incredible diversity of natural features and subsequent recreational opportunities are a direct result of its location at the intersection of the Great Plains with the Ozark Plateau. Situated on the eastern edges of the Great Plains, northern and portions of western Missouri were once covered by vast prairies, remnant pockets that still exist at places such as Prairie State Park. These fertile plains, bisected by rivers and streams, now make up a large portion of the state's agricultural landscape.

South of the Missouri River is the Ozark Plateau. The karst topography of this heavily wooded region contributes to Missouri's moniker as the "cave state," with most of the state's nearly 7,500 recorded caves to be found in this area. In the southeast region of the Ozark Plateau stand the St. Francois Mountains, older than the Appalachian Mountains and containing the highest point in Missouri, Taum Sauk Mountain.

The Bootheel region, located in the far southeast corner of the state, was once covered in swamps and lowland forests more typical of the Mississippi coastal forests of

Louisiana and Mississippi. The state park system's last remaining cypress swamp is preserved at Big Oak Tree State Park.

Two of America's most important waterways flow through Missouri – the Mississippi River, which snakes along the state's entire eastern border, and the Missouri River, which slices through the middle of the state. Many additional rivers and streams flow through the state, making Missouri a paddler's paradise. Two rivers – the Current and Jacks Fork rivers – are part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, the first national park area to protect a river system. Additionally, a 44-mile section of the Eleven Point River has been designated a National Wild and Scenic River and is managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Several major lakes contribute to the water-based recreation opportunities within Missouri, including the 55,000-acre Lake of the Ozarks, one of the largest lakes in the state and a major resort destination. Other lakes include Mark Twain and Stockton lakes in the north; Longview, Smithville, and Blue Springs lakes in the Kansas City region;

Truman, Pomme de Terre, and Stockton lakes in the southwest region of the state; Clearwater and Wappapello lakes in the southeast; and Table Rock and Bull Shoals along the southern border.

Missouri Outdoor Recreation Providers

Missouri is fortunate to have a cadre of federal, state, and local government providers managing the diversity of its recreation offerings. Each has a critical niche to fill – federal managers protect the state’s resources of national significance, state managers protect resources of statewide importance and provide compatible recreational opportunities, and local agencies provide close-to-home recreational opportunities for their community residents. Public land in Missouri totals approximately three million acres (see Table 1), which accounts for nearly 7% of the state’s 44,248,320 total acres. Map 2 depicts the locations of public lands in Missouri by agency type.

Table 1. Acreage of Public Lands in Missouri

Public Lands	Acreage
Federal	1,703,983 ¹
State	1,137,000
Local	112,030*
Total	2,953,013

*Estimate based on community inventory as described below.

Local Recreation Providers

Missouri is home to 114 counties and one independent city (St. Louis), and 959 incorporated places.² Many of these counties, cities, towns, and villages fill an essential role in providing close-to-home recreation opportunities for their residents. In many cases, public school districts also contribute to the outdoor recreation opportunities within a community, oftentimes as the sole provider of the local playground, ballfield, play court, or walking track. A 2010 study found that 71% of school

districts in Missouri had adopted a joint community use policy allowing their outdoor recreation facilities to be used by community residents outside of school hours.³

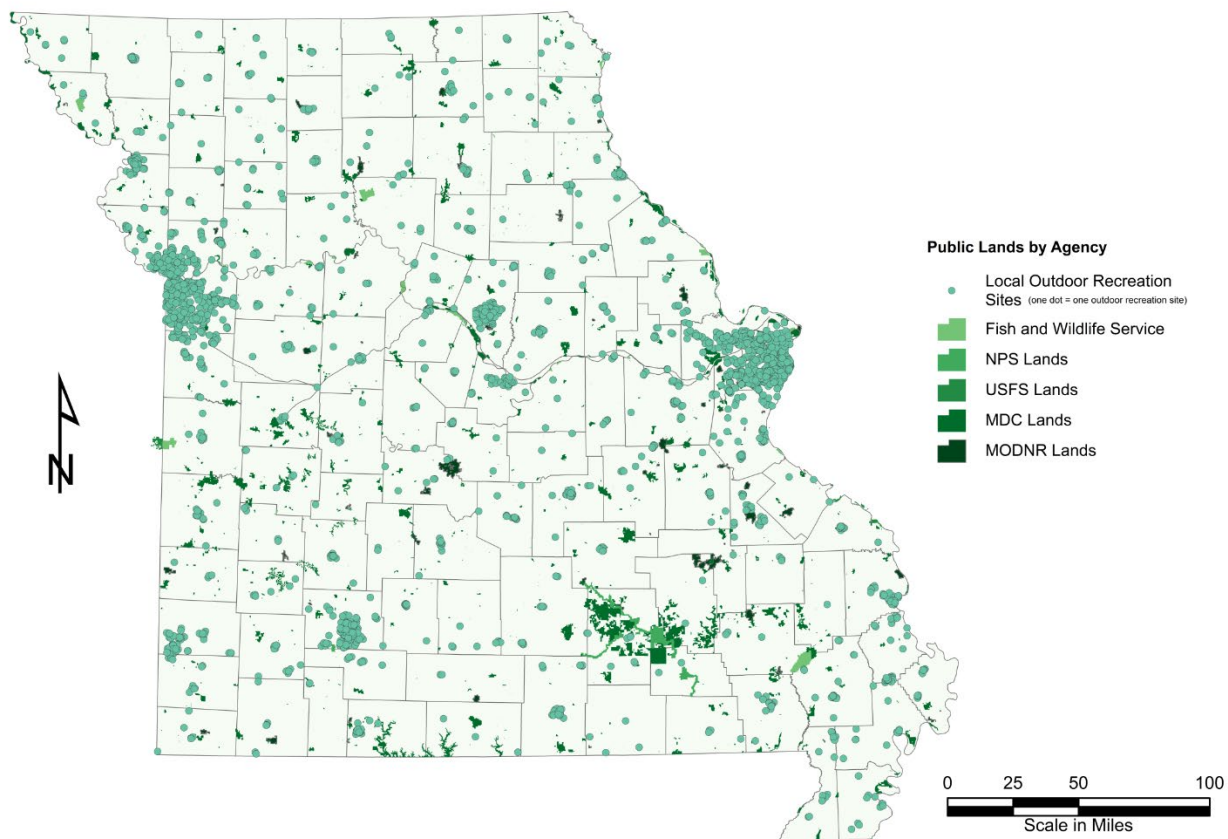
In 2016, a statewide inventory identified public recreation providers and local recreation sites. A list of incorporated places with public parks and other outdoor recreation facilities was compiled using Missouri’s LWCF database of grant recipients, self-reported data from members of the MPRA, a search of local parks and recreation department websites, and a review of online aerial maps. Local public recreation providers in the state range in size from small communities with one park managed by City Hall to large municipal and county park and recreation agencies with thousands of acres of parkland. Not surprisingly, the largest recreation providers are associated with large population centers in the state – Jackson County, St. Louis County, City of Kansas City, Clay County, St. Charles County, City of Columbia, Springfield-Greene County, and the City of St. Louis.

However, many small communities also contain parks. Over 200 Missouri communities with populations of 500 or less contain at least one park or outdoor recreation facility. A quarter (26%) of these communities received LWCF grants sometime in the past, underscoring the importance of the LWCF program to smaller communities with limited resources. The vast majority (88%) of those grants, however, were distributed in the early decades of the LWCF program. Very few of these smaller communities have received subsequent grant funding for much-needed improvements to their aging park facilities, underlying the difficulty many of these communities face in leveraging non-federal match dollars.

Although 233 communities across Missouri have established local sales taxes to fund parks and stormwater improvements, the lack of a consistent funding system still plagues many parks and recreation agencies, as indicated in the Recreation Providers Survey. Future LWCF funding priorities should focus on rehabilitating aging park infrastructure, particularly in smaller communities. Additionally, a concerted effort needs to be undertaken to assist communities in finding non-federal funding sources to be used as grant matches.

In addition to revealing the need to emphasize rehabilitation of aging infrastructure, the inventory process also exposed the need for a more comprehensive mechanism for assembling park and facility data. This continues to be an area of need. Priority should be given to developing a GIS-based asset management system of park locations with area boundaries and facility types. This is especially critical for LWCF project sites, to be sure Section 6(f)(3) boundaries are maintained in perpetuity.

Map 2.
Missouri Public Lands



Source: MODNR, MODOT, USFWS

State Recreation Providers

Missouri is distinctive among many states in that it has two state agencies responsible for managing the state's outdoor recreation resources. The Missouri Department of Conservation manages the state's fish, forest, and wildlife resources, while Missouri State Parks, a division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, preserves the state's outstanding natural landscapes and cultural landmarks. Both agencies are funded by sales taxes approved by the citizens of Missouri – the 1/8th cent Design for Conservation Sales Tax that funds MDC and the 1/10th cent Parks, Soils, and Water Sales Tax that funds MSP. Both sales taxes demonstrate the importance of resource protection and outdoor recreation to Missouri's citizenry.

Missouri Department of Conservation

The Missouri Department of Conservation administers more than 1,000 conservation areas that total nearly 1 million acres statewide and host nearly 9 million visitors annually. MDC sites offer a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, including fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, camping, and gun and archery target practice. Additionally, the department operates programs at nature centers and interpretive sites that are open to the public. Together, these centers and sites see more than 800,000 visitors each year and host over 186,850 programs. Table 2 lists the number of facilities by activity that the department manages.

Table 2. MDC Facilities by Activity

Activity	Number of Facilities
Biking	64
Boating	321
Camping	324
Fishing	589
Hiking	195
Horseback Riding	43

Hunting	529
Picnicking	67
Target Shooting	63

Missouri State Parks

Missouri's state park system plays a unique role in providing parks, open spaces, and cultural opportunities. Generally, local and community parks focus on providing recreation and open spaces close to home. National parks were created to preserve natural and historic wonders of national and international significance. Missouri's state park system fits somewhere in between: it preserves and interprets landscapes and cultural features of at least statewide or regional significance and provides appropriate or compatible recreation.

The Missouri state park system encompasses over 162,000 acres, with 93 state parks and historic sites as well as the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry, a 60,000-acre privately owned forest along the Current River cooperatively managed by the L-A-D Foundation and MSP. Hosting over 20 million visitors annually, Missouri's state parks and historic sites provide a wide array of recreational opportunities and unique experiences, ranging from the tiny 0.3-acre Thomas Hart Benton Home and Studio State Historic Site to the substantial Lake of the Ozarks State Park, at 17,600+ acres. Table 3 lists the state parks and historic sites within the system and their respective acreages. Within the system, there are more than 2,000 structures, 3,722 campsites, 364 cabins and lodging units, 2,000 picnic sites, and 1,110 miles of trail. These trails include opportunities for hikers, backpackers, bicycle riders, off-road vehicle users, and horseback riders. Missouri State Parks also boasts the longest developed rails-to-trail project in the nation, Katy Trail State Park. Additionally, 38 natural areas have been designated within the state park system, totaling nearly 30,000 acres.

The MSP system also includes state-designated wild areas. The Missouri Wild Area System was partially modeled after the National Wilderness Preservation System. Wild areas are protected for the benefits they provide for hiking and backpacking, as well as the benefits they provide as outdoor classrooms for environmental education and as increasingly important reservoirs of scientific information. A wild area must be a “spacious” tract of land, typically 1,000 or more acres in size. It must also appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with limited human interference, and to possess outstanding opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation. Today, over 26,000 acres at 13 state parks are designated as Missouri wild areas.

Missouri Department of Agriculture

While not an outdoor recreation provider in the traditional sense, the Missouri Department of Agriculture manages the 400-acre Missouri State Fairgrounds. Site of the annual State Fair in August, the Fairgrounds also include an LWCF-funded campground, as well as an RTP-funded trail spur to the Katy Trail.

Federal Recreation Providers

In Missouri, federal agencies providing outdoor recreation include the Department of the Interior’s NPS and USFWS, the Department of Agriculture’s U.S. Forest Service, and the Department of Defense’s U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

National Park Service

The NPS manages seven national park units totaling 83,519 acres in Missouri. These seven units attract over 4 million visitors annually and generate over \$418 million in tourism revenue.⁴

The seven National Park Service units include:

- **George Washington Carver National Monument** – located in Diamond in southwest Missouri, the monument preserves the birthplace and childhood home of the renowned African American agricultural botanist and educator.
- **Gateway Arch National Park** – located in St. Louis, the park reflects St. Louis’ role in the 19th-century westward expansion of the United States and Thomas Jefferson’s role in opening the West.
- **Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site** – also located in St. Louis, this site preserves White Haven, the home of the former Civil War general and 18th president of the United States.
- **Ozark National Scenic Riverways** – the Ozark National Scenic Riverways preserves 134 miles of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers, in the southeast part of the state. The Current River is of global conservation significance according to The Nature Conservancy and provides habitat for myriad aquatic species, many populations that occur only in this river.
- **Harry S Truman National Historic Site** – the site preserves the home of President Truman, the nation’s 33rd president, in Independence, as well as the Truman Farm Home in Grandview. Both are within the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Table 3. Missouri State Park System Facilities and Acreage

Facility	Acres	Facility	Acres
Arrow Rock State Historic Site	167.4	Locust Creek Covered Bridge State Hist. Site	32.2
Dr. Edmund E. Babler Memorial State Park	2,441.0	Long Branch State Park	1,828.5
Sam A. Baker State Park	5,323.6	Mastodon State Historic Site	431.1
Battle of Athens State Historic Site	408.5	Meramec State Park	6,896.3
Battle of Carthage State Historic Site	7.4	Missouri Mines State Historic Site	64.6
Battle of Island Mound State Historic Site	40.0	Missouri State Museum & Jefferson Landing State Hist. Site	1.3
Battle of Lexington State Historic Site	95.6	Montauk State Park	2,920.1
Battle of Pilot Knob State Historic Site	77.4	Morris State Park	161.2
Bennett Spring State Park	3,338.6	Jay Nixon Backcountry	1,231.7
Thomas Hart Benton Home & Studio State Historic Site	0.3	Onondaga Cave State Park	1,357.7
Big Lake State Park	407.4	Osage Village State Historic Site	100.0
Big Oak Tree State Park	1,028.7	Pershing State Park	5,362.2
Big Sugar Creek State Park	2,082.5	Gen. John J. Pershing Boyhood Home State Hist. Site	5.6
Bollinger Mill State Historic Site	43.9	Pomme de Terre State Park	734.4
Boone's Lick State Historic Site	51.2	Prairie State Park	3,955.3
Nathan & Olive Boone Homestead State Hist. Site	400.2	Roaring River State Park	4,820.7
Bothwell Lodge State Historic Site	246.9	Robertsville State Park	1,224.7
Bryant Creek State Park	2,917.0	Don Robinson State Park	818.2
Castlewood State Park	1,818.8	Rock Bridge Memorial State Park	2,272.8
Clark's Hill/Norton State Historic Site	13.40	Rock Island Trail State Park	2,843.8
Confederate Memorial State Historic Site	135.2	Route 66 State Park	424.0
Edward "Ted" & Pat Jones-Confluence Point State Park	1,121.4	St. Francois State Park	2,735.0
Crowder State Park	1,912.1	St. Joe State Park	8,243.0
Cuivre River State Park	6,468.0	Sandy Creek Covered Bridge State Hist. Site	211.8
Current River State Park	839.0	Sappington African American Cemetery State Hist. Site	2.3
Deutschheim State Historic Site	0.7	Sappington Cemetery State Hist. Site	2.0
Dillard Mill State Historic Site	131.8	Shepherd of the Hills State Park	1011.0
Gov. Daniel Dunklin's Grave State Historic Site	1.4	Stockton State Park	2,175.9
Echo Bluff State Park	476.6	Table Rock State Park	356.0
Elephant Rocks State Park	133.8	Taum Sauk Mountain State Park	8,395.1
Eleven Point State Park	4,167.0	Thousand Hills State Park	3,086.8
Finger Lakes State Park	1,138.1	Towosahgy State Historic Site	64.0
First Missouri State Capitol State Historic Site	0.7	Trail of Tears State Park	3,415.4
Graham Cave State Park	386.1	Harry S Truman Birthplace State Hist. Site	2.5
Grand Gulf State Park	322.0	Harry S Truman State Park	1,440.0
Ha Ha Tonka State Park	3,751.7	Mark Twain State Park	2,775.1
Hawn State Park	4,955.7	Mark Twain Birthplace State Hist. Site	13.0
Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site	19.8	Union Covered Bridge State Historic Site	1.2
Illiniwek Village State Historic Site	127.5	Felix Valle House State Historic Site	0.8
Jewell Cemetery State Historic Site	0.5	Annie & Abel Van Meter State Park	1,104.6
Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park	9,432.3	Wakonda State Park	1,053.9
Scott Joplin House State Historic Site	3.9	Wallace State Park	573.4
Katy Trail State Park	2,937.3	Washington State Park	2,157.6
Knob Noster State Park	3,934.4	Watkins Mill State Park	876.2
Lake of the Ozarks State Park	17,666.2	Watkins Woolen Mill State Historic Site	624.0
Lake Wappapello State Park	1,854.2	Weston Bend State Park	1,133.1
Lewis and Clark State Park	189.1		

- **Ste. Geneviève National Historic Park** - Located on the western bank of the Mississippi River in Ste. Geneviève, this park preserves three examples of vernacular architecture in the first permanent European settlement in Missouri.
- **Wilson's Creek National Battlefield** - located near Springfield in the southwest part of the state, Wilson's Creek was the first major Civil War battle fought west of the Mississippi River, and the site of the death of Nathaniel Lyon, the first Union general killed in action.

The NPS also manages the National Trails System. Established by the National Trails System Act of 1968, the system includes national scenic trails, national historic trails, national recreation trails, and side and connecting trails. Missouri is fortunate to have six such trails in the state, including the California, Lewis and Clark, Oregon, Pony Express, Santa Fe, and Trail of Tears national historic trails.



White Haven at Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The National Wildlife Refuge System, within the USFWS, manages a national network of lands and waters set aside to conserve America's fish, wildlife, and plants. Additionally, the refuges provide wildlife-related recreational opportunities, such as

hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and photography.

In Missouri, there are seven National Wildlife Refuges⁵ totaling 73,907 acres:

- **Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge** - 17 units make up this refuge highlighting habitats along the Missouri River. Three units - Panther Creek, West St. Clair and Moresi - are found south of the Missouri River on the western side of the state.
- **Clarence Cannon National Wildlife Refuge** - located in Pike County, the refuge is in the floodplain of the Mississippi River and is comprised of managed moist soil units, open water, wet meadows, and bottomland forest habitats.
- **Great River National Wildlife Refuge** - this refuge is made up of six divisions within the floodplain of the Mississippi River, four of which are located in Missouri - the Fox Island, Cherry Box, Canton, and Slim & Haps Island divisions.
- **Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge** - formerly known as Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge is located in the northwest portion of the state. Featuring wetlands, grasslands, and forests, the area is known for the 310+ species of resident and migratory birds that use it each year.
- **Mingo National Wildlife Refuge** - located in southeast Missouri in Stoddard and Wayne counties, Mingo National Wildlife Refuge preserves the swamps and bottomland hardwood forests left by an abandoned channel of the Mississippi River. It is also the site of the 7,730-acre Mingo Wilderness Area.
- **Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge** - located in the north central part of the state, the refuge is managed for migratory birds, including waterfowl, geese, and shorebirds. It also provides a natural

habitat for many neotropical migrating species of birds.

- **Pilot Knob National Wildlife Refuge** – the 90-acre refuge is a peak in the St. Francois Mountains in Iron County. The refuge contains abandoned iron mine shafts excavated in the mid-1800s that have since become critical habitat for the federally endangered Indiana bat. To avoid disturbance to the bats and for public safety, the refuge is closed to the public.

Two additional refuges in Missouri include the Ozark Cavefish National Wildlife Refuge and the Middle Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge. The Ozark Cavefish National Wildlife Refuge was acquired to protect a federally threatened species, the Ozark cavefish, and is closed to the public to avoid potential impact on the fish. The refuge is managed by the Mingo National Wildlife Refuge. The Middle Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge consists of seven island divisions that lie within the uncontrolled portion of the Middle Mississippi River, below the confluence with the Missouri River, where river levels are not regulated by the lock and dam system. The Harlow Island Division is the only unit within this refuge located in Missouri.

U.S. Forest Service

The Mark Twain National Forest, managed by the USFS, encompasses 1.5 million acres in 29 counties in central and southern Missouri.⁶ Mark Twain National Forest provides a wide range of popular recreation opportunities, including over 750 miles of trails for hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and motorized use. Approximately 350 miles of the 430-mile-long Ozark Trail wind through the forest. More than 350 miles of perennial streams, suitable for floating canoeing and kayaking, meander through its canopied expanses. The forest's more than 35 campgrounds offer visitors a variety of forest experiences, including semi-primitive

and wilderness camping for solitude. The Mark Twain National Forest has seven Congressionally designated wilderness areas; although smaller than most wildernesses in the National Forest System, they are wild areas of great natural beauty.

Additionally, a 44-mile section of the Eleven Point River, between Thomasville and the Highway 142 bridge near Gatewood in southeastern Missouri, is managed by the USFS as a National Wild and Scenic River. This section of the Eleven Point is free of impoundments with a largely undeveloped shoreline and watershed.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The USACE is a U.S. federal agency under the Department of Defense, responsible for civil works projects in the U.S., such as dams, canals, flood protection, hydroelectric reservoirs, and other water resource projects. The Corps also provides outdoor recreation opportunities to the public, including hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, wildlife viewing, and equestrian use. The USACE operates 12 lakes within three districts in Missouri. Many of the recreational lands surrounding the Corps lakes are leased and managed by other recreation providers.

Kansas City District:

- **Blue Springs Lake** –located in Lee's Summit in the Kansas City Region, Blue Springs Lake recreational opportunities in Fleming Park are managed by Jackson County Parks & Rec. Amenities include campgrounds, trails, boat launches, a marina, and picnicking areas.

- **Long Branch Lake** – adjacent to Macon in north Missouri, the recreational opportunities at Long Branch Lake are managed by MSP. Amenities at Long Branch State Park include boat ramps and a marina, a swimming beach, fishing locations, a campground, hiking trails, and the Chariton River Hills Natural Area.
- **Longview Lake** – also managed by Jackson County Parks & Rec, Longview Lake Park offers camping, a horse park, a public golf course, swimming, a softball complex, a marina, fishing, and picnicking.
- **Pomme de Terre Lake** – two state park locations in Pomme de Terre State Park – Hermitage and Pittsburg – offer camping, boat launches, a marina, swimming beaches, fishing, and hiking trails. Eight other campgrounds are located along the lake, six of which are managed by the Corps.
- **Smithville Lake** – the recreational opportunities at Smithville Lake are managed by Clay County Parks, Recreation, and Historic Sites. Amenities include swimming beaches, campgrounds, marinas, a dockside restaurant, two public 18-hole golf courses, disc golf courses, mountain bike and equestrian trails, fishing and hunting areas, and a native grassland restoration area.
- **Stockton Lake** – several campgrounds and boat access areas are located on Stockton Lake, as is Stockton State Park. Northwest of Springfield, the state park provides a marina with a sailing school, boat launches, fishing sites, a swimming beach, a campground, lodging cabins, and hiking and mountain biking trails. Additionally, the 20-acre Bona Glade Natural Area is located within the Stockton Lake project area.
- **Harry S Truman Lake** – located in the western central part of Missouri, the

recreational opportunities at Truman Lake include five marinas, hunting and fishing, hiking and equestrian trails, multiple campgrounds, and Cooper Creek ATV/Dirt Bike Area. Harry S Truman State Park is also located on Truman Lake.

Saint Louis District:

- **Mark Twain Lake** – located in north central Missouri, Mark Twain Lake offers swimming beaches, two marinas, fishing locations, boat ramps, campgrounds, hiking and equestrian trails, hunting, and a shooting range. Mark Twain State Park is centrally located on the lake.
- **Wappapello Lake** – located in Wayne and Butler counties in the southeast corner of the state, recreational opportunities at Wappapello Lake include camping and cabin rentals; hiking, backpacking, biking, and equestrian trails; boat launches and fishing locations; swimming beaches; hunting areas; and picnicking areas.

Little Rock District:

- **Bull Shoals Lake** – located in southwestern Missouri and north central Arkansas, 19 parks around the lake offer facilities including campgrounds, pavilions, docks and boat launches, picnic sites, fishing areas, swimming areas, and commercial marinas.
- **Clearwater Lake** – located near Piedmont in the southeastern portion of the state, Clearwater Lake offers five campgrounds, three swim beaches, picnic and playground areas, boat ramps, fishing sites, and hiking and biking trails.
- **Table Rock Lake** – located in the tourist hotspot of Branson, Table Rock State Park offers a marina, fishing, boat launches, camping, sailing, scuba diving, hiking, and mountain biking.

Missouri Natural Areas

The Missouri Natural Areas Program makes certain that protection is afforded to some of the most significant natural landscapes within the state, formally recognizing that these areas are the least disturbed and highest-quality biological and geological sites across the state. Jointly managed by the MDC and the MoDNR, the program safeguards the best, and oftentimes the last, examples of Missouri's original landscapes, including remnant prairies, old-growth forests and woodlands, rare wetlands, caves, and many other kinds of native habitat. The scientific, educational, and recreational values of Missouri's natural areas are incalculable.

There are 182 natural areas encompassing over 100,000 acres within the state. Map 3 depicts the locations of natural areas in Missouri. These areas are owned or managed by a variety of public and private land managers, including:

- National Park Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- Mo. Dept. of Conservation
- Mo. Dept. of Natural Resources
- Excelsior Springs Parks & Rec. Dept.
- Gladstone Parks, Recreation & Cultural Arts Dept.
- Jackson Co. Parks & Rec
- Kansas City Parks & Recreation Dept.
- City of Joplin
- St. Louis Co. Parks & Recreation Dept.
- University of Missouri-Columbia
- Audubon Society of Missouri
- Boone Co. Pinnacles Youth Foundation
- Doe Run Mineral Corporation
- L-A-D Foundation
- Missouri Botanical Garden
- Missouri Prairie Foundation
- The Nature Conservancy

Wetlands

Section 303 of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 requires states to include a wetlands component in their SCORPs, since LWCF monies may be used to acquire wetlands. Wetlands are no longer common in any part of Missouri. Nearly 90% of the historic native wetlands have been drained and now serve as pasture, urban development, or farmland.

Although Missouri's wetlands have been substantially reduced from their historic extent, they remain incredibly valuable for conservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental involvement. Modern wetlands contribute significantly to tourism and outdoor recreation in Missouri, with hunting, fishing, hiking, and birding all being popular wetland pursuits. Missouri's remaining wetlands also serve as the primary habitat for 200 plant and animal species of conservation concern in Missouri. Many thousands of waterfowl seek Missouri wetlands as wintering grounds, breeding grounds, or stopovers during migration. All 44 of Missouri's amphibian species continue to

Map 3. Natural Areas in Missouri



depend on them, and many species of native fish, songbirds, mammals, and insects inhabit them.

Recognizing their significant resource and recreational value, Missouri's land management agencies are engaged in a concerted effort to restore, manage, interpret, or preserve wetlands on public lands. Examples include the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the USFWS' National Wildlife Refuge system, and the USACE Missouri River Recovery Program. Additionally, Missouri's Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy includes many Conservation Opportunity Areas with featured wetlands. These COAs are an important means of focusing cooperative effort toward conservation priorities in Missouri's most significant resource localities, and many include important wetland regions. COAs are priority areas for many of Missouri's major programs, grants, and management initiatives, as well as an important means for Missouri's public, environmental constituents, and resource agencies to interact.

Missouri's two state resource agencies also place a premium on wetland restoration and preservation. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), which owns considerable public land in Missouri, has 42,120 acres across 14 intensively managed wetlands as well as an additional 100,000 acres of opportunistically flooded wetlands across the State. Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) help private and tribal landowners protect, restore, and enhance wetlands that have been previously degraded due to agricultural uses. Some of Missouri's WRE acres have been purchased by MDC and are now in public ownership. MDC also assists the USACE in developing and maintaining public lands set aside for mitigation of water control works and

navigation environmental impacts along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

Wetland restoration and management is also a primary emphasis of MSP and, through boardwalks, trails, overlooks, visitor centers, wayside exhibits, and naturalist programs, gives the public opportunities to experience and connect to natural wetlands. Some of Missouri's most unique types of wetlands are located within state parks, including the wet prairies of Pershing State Park in northern Missouri; the swamps of Big Oak Tree State Park in the southeastern part of the state; and the freshwater marshes and fens of Annie and Abel Van Meter State Park, located in the north central part of the state.

In addition to individual agency initiatives, MDC and MSP jointly administer the Missouri Natural Areas program. As described in the previous section, a primary function of this program is to designate the best remaining examples of Missouri's native natural environments, including wetlands, as state natural areas to be "managed and protected for their scientific, educational, and historic values." These offer an important mechanism for recognizing and preserving important examples of Missouri's wetlands and natural communities.

Because of their habitat importance and recreation significance, wetlands of any type should be an acquisition priority for land managers. Those situated near existing wetlands and public lands have particularly high value, as they expand and concentrate natural systems into functional core units that are most valuable for conserving species and maintaining wetland function, as well as the public's opportunity to experience them. Additionally, several rare wetland types should receive particularly high emphasis, including wet prairies, fens, marshes, flatwoods, swamps, and wet bottomland forests. Strategically, acquisitions that accomplish objectives within designated

COAs, enhance protection of Missouri Natural Areas, and offer the best opportunity for the public to experience natural wetlands should receive top priority. Facilities to make wetlands more available and accessible to the public, including trails, boardwalks, viewing areas, and interpretation, should be a part of the overall state plan.

Trails

Trails are perhaps one of the most valuable recreation resources in the varied spectrum of facilities and amenities offered by recreation providers. Trails reach across demographic differences as the most likely to be used of any other outdoor recreation amenity. One of the most direct benefits of community trails and greenways is the close-to-home, accessible recreational opportunities they provide. Trails offer a way to serve a diverse population that may otherwise have limited opportunities to access outdoor areas due to financial or transportation constraints.

Trails also provide affordable exercise opportunities for residents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity, such as brisk walking or hiking, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous intensity activity, such as hiking uphill or with a heavy backpack, for significant health benefits, such as:

- Lower risk of:
 - early death
 - heart disease and stroke
 - high blood pressure
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - colon and breast cancer
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight
- Improved cardiorespiratory fitness
- Improved bone health
- Reduced depression⁷



Additionally, while people who suffer from arthritis may have difficulty being physically active, walking and hiking can potentially reduce joint pain and improve function for many adults with arthritis.⁸

In 2013, Missouri was named the “Best Trails State” by American Trails, a national nonprofit organization working on behalf of the nation’s hiking, biking, and riding trails. Missouri does indeed have much to tout regarding its trail accomplishments. From a short walk on a paved trail to a hike through the wilderness, Missouri’s extensive trail system offers broadly appealing options. More than 500 miles of National Recreation

Trails designated by the U.S. Department of the Interior traverse the state. Missouri lives up to its reputation as “Gateway to the West” with significant National Historic Trails, including the Lewis and Clark, Trail of Tears, and Santa Fe national historic trails passing through the state, and the Pony Express, California, and Oregon national historic trails beginning on the western border.

Missouri is also the home to the 240-mile Katy Trail State Park, currently the longest completed rail-trail in the nation. Additionally, the new Rock Island Trail State Park connects to the Katy Trail State Park, and once completed, will become part of a trail network crossing the entire state of Missouri, linking Kansas City to St. Louis. The Rock Island Trail State Park encompasses the former 48-mile Rock Island Spur of Katy Trail State Park, with an additional 144 miles of undeveloped corridor that remains closed to the public until the trail is developed. Another long-distance trail, the Ozark Trail, is a hiking and backpacking trail in the southeastern part of the state that connects multiple state and federal public lands through some of the most rugged and beautiful areas of the Ozarks. Currently 430 miles long and growing, the Ozark Trail will eventually reach the Arkansas border, where it will connect with the Ozark Highlands Trail.

Not surprisingly, with its abundance of rivers and lakes, Missouri is also home to several water trails. The Mississippi River Water Trail stretches 121 miles of the Upper Mississippi River from Saverton to St. Louis. Other water trails include the 550-mile Missouri River Water Trail; sections of the Jacks Fork, Current, Eleven Point, Gasconade, James, and Niangua rivers; sections of Shoal, Bryant, and Courtois creeks; as well as lake trails at Stockton, Lake of the Ozarks, Wakonda, and Finger Lakes state parks.

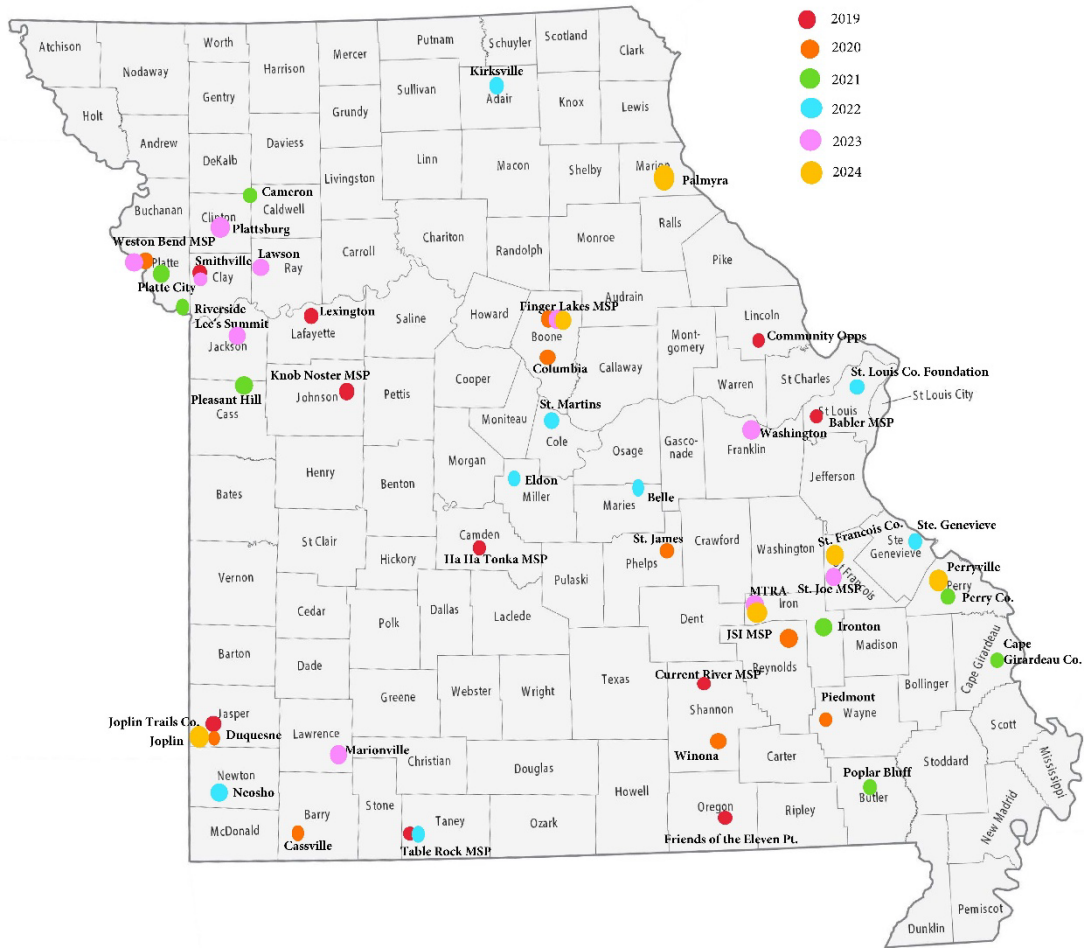
Missouri’s growing trail system is due in large part to the Federal Highway Administration’s

Recreational Trails Program. The RTP is a federally funded assistance program authorized by the U.S. Congress under the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act. Its purpose is to help states provide and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both motorized and non-motorized recreational use. In Missouri, the MoDNR administers RTP, with direct oversight of the program by MSP. The Missouri Trails Advisory Board, a nine-member panel, assists MSP with the administration of the program by evaluating the RTP grant applications and recommending projects for funding on an annual basis. Between 2017 and 2024, MSP awarded more than \$12 million to 72 recreation trail projects throughout the state. Map 4 depicts the locations of RTP projects in Missouri.

Summary

Missouri is fortunate to have an abundance of natural resources and diverse outdoor recreational opportunities. Public outdoor recreation sites run the gamut, from vast tracts of forests managed by the USFS to small pocket parks in downtown areas operated by local parks and recreation departments. Missourians are invested in their public outdoor spaces, as is evidenced by the number of approved sales tax initiatives across the state. However, lack of funding remains a critical issue, particularly in smaller communities where the tax base does not fully support the outdoor recreation needs of their residents. Future LWCF grant opportunities should prioritize renovation of aging park infrastructure, especially in these smaller communities, while greater emphasis should be given to assisting communities in identifying sources of non-federal matching dollars.

Map 4.
Missouri RTP Project Sites 2017-2024



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ISSUES & TRENDS

Missouri's population is expected to approach 6.8 million people in 2030, a growth of roughly 1.2 million people from the year 2000, a 21% increase in the state's population. Missouri's rank among the nation's most populous states has been on the decline since the turn of the century, when Missouri ranked fifth in the nation. The state's projected growth rate of approximately 6% per decade is slower than the nation's projected rate of 10% per decade.¹

Natural change (births minus deaths) will continue to add the largest number of people to Missouri's population. Natural change is expected to add an average of 244,000 Missourians per decade. Moreover, net migration (those migrating in compared to those migrating out) is expected to further increase Missouri's population by 139,000 persons every 10 years.

Recent migration trends predict the outlook for the next 30 years to be large growth in the suburban counties around Kansas City, St. Louis, and Springfield. In contrast, significant population declines are predicted for St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and many agricultural counties. The population has shifted from rural agricultural areas to urban areas and to rural areas rich in recreational amenities. Projections show that these patterns will continue, with more movement

to urban fringe areas. Missouri is expected to experience the greatest growth in Christian and Lincoln counties. Their populations are projected to more than double between 2000 and 2030. The top five most populous counties in the state in 2000 were St. Louis, Jackson, St. Louis City, St. Charles, and Greene. Those counties are projected to remain the largest in the state in 2030. Table 4 lists the 10 counties projected to be the most populous and their projected populations for 2030.

Table 4. 2030 Population Projections by Top 10 Counties in Missouri

Population Rank ⁹	County	2030 Population Projections
1	St. Louis	956,817
2	Jackson	714,467
3	St. Charles	499,126
4	St. Louis City	349,004
5	Greene	329,825
6	Clay	300,021
7	Jefferson	260,276
8	Boone	204,264
9	Jasper	152,490
10	Cass	136,933

However, newer data from the University of Missouri shows that recent growth has been slower than previous projections suggested. Between 2019 and 2020, Missouri added just over 11,000 residents, a growth rate of 0.2%, which is half the national average of 0.4%. Growth also varies by region. Cities like

Springfield and Columbia grew faster, at 0.8% and 0.7%, while 62 of Missouri's 115 counties, including St. Louis City, lost population during that time.²

Changing Demographics

The face of Missourians will change along with the state's population numbers. These changes will have a direct impact on the state's outdoor recreation provision.

An Aging Population

The older population in the United States has grown rapidly over the past century, with especially notable increases in recent decades. Between 1920 and 2020, the number of people aged 65 and over grew nearly five times faster than the total U.S. population.³ This trend accelerated between 2010 and 2020, when the 65-and-over population experienced its largest and fastest growth since 1880–1890, reaching 55.8 million, or 16.8% of the total population. Chart 1 shows the increase in population for Americans 65 or older from 1920 to 2020. In 2020, about 1 in 6 Americans were 65 or older, compared to fewer than 1 in 20 in 1920.

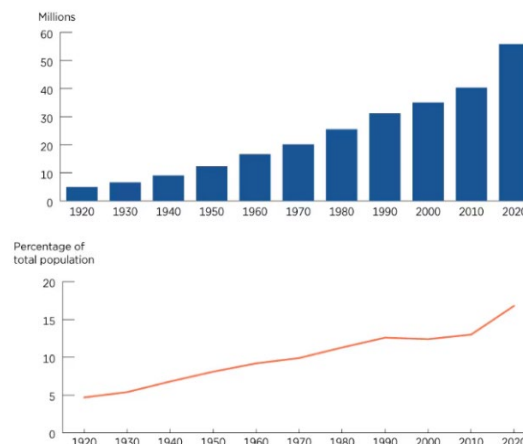
This surge is largely driven by the aging of the baby boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964), the first of whom turned 65 in 2011. By 2035, all baby boomers will be older than 65, significantly expanding the size of the older population. While the growth rate of this group is expected to slow after 2030, older adults will continue to make up a substantial share of the U.S. population for decades to come. By 2060, nearly 25% will be over age 65.⁴ The national median age is also projected to rise from 38.78 in 2020 to over 40.01 by 2030, meaning nearly half the country's population will be in their 40s or older.⁵

Missouri, too, will experience an aging population. Missouri's aging population is

following trends nearly identical to those seen nationwide. In 2000, approximately 756,000 Missourians, or 13% of the state's population, were aged 65 and older. Currently, about 1.3 million Missourians, roughly 19% of the state's 6.8 million residents, are aged 65 or older, with around 2% over the age of 85.⁴

Chart 1. U.S. Older Population³

Population 65 Years and Over by Size and Percentage of Total Population: 1920 to 2020



Note: For information on data collection, confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, refer to <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/technical-documentation/complete-tech-docs/demographic-and-housing-characteristics-file-and-demographic-profile/2020census-demographic-and-housing-characteristics-file-and-demographic-profile-techdoc.pdf>.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1900 to 2000; 2010 Census Summary File 1, and 2020 Census Demographic and Housing Characteristics File (DHC).

With the increase in older adults will come an increase in age-related illnesses, many of which can be combated or minimized by regular physical activity. Chronic diseases remain a leading concern for Missouri's aging population. Heart disease and cancer account for approximately 40% of deaths among residents aged 65 and older.⁴

The aging of Missouri's population will have a profound effect on the services, facilities, and programming expected of recreation providers. Providers will need to be certain that accessible trails and greenways connect parks to retirement communities, residential facilities, and senior centers.

Programs that target older participants, such as walking programs, birdwatching, or senior trips, will become increasingly popular. Additionally, communities will experience an

increasing demand for the development of park amenities and facilities specific to older adults.

Local and Statewide Trends and Initiatives

According to a 2024 national survey conducted by the National Recreation and Park Association, 92% of park and recreation agencies offer facilities, activities, and programming that cater to older adults.⁶ These agencies report that promoting social connection and addressing social isolation are top benefits of their older adult programming. Furthermore, 30% of park and recreation agencies dedicate 10% more of their annual budget to older adult programming and outreach.

However, due to staffing and budgeting issues, these agencies frequently look for partners to assist with funding, programming, and transportation.⁷ For example, in an effort to reach its senior audience, MSP is partnering with the MPA, a non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the Missouri state park system, on the “Seniors to State Parks Outreach Program.” This program provides special opportunities designed for seniors and individuals with disabilities to explore and enjoy Missouri’s outdoors and its history. Transportation, lunch, tours, and activities are provided as part of these outings.

Among activities recommended to improve health in older adults is the game of pickleball, which has received considerable recent attention because of its rapidly growing popularity amongst seniors.⁸ According to a recent Spectrum News article, St. Louis is among the top five cities in the nation for pickleball. Missouri has 269 pickleball courts, ranking the state 18th in the nation for total courts.⁹ The oddly named sport has been described as a combination of tennis, ping pong, and badminton, played with a racquet resembling a large ping pong paddle and a ball resembling a whiffle ball,

on a court half the size of a tennis court. Its popularity with the older generation is due in large part to its lower physical impact and its social nature. A plus for recreation providers is the minimal infrastructure investment if using an existing tennis court or other play court, only requiring painted lines delineating the pickleball court.

A Diversifying Population

In addition to an aging population, the United States is growing increasingly racially, ethnically, and socially diverse. According to the 2020 Census, the White alone population declined by 8.6% since 2010.¹⁰ In contrast, the number of people identifying as two or more races increased by 276%, rising from 9 million to 33.8 million. When individuals who identify as multiracial are included, every racial group saw population growth over the decade.

Looking ahead, the non-Hispanic White population is projected to decline from 199 million in 2020 to 179 million by 2060, even as the total U.S. population continues to grow. This decline is largely driven by lower birth rates and an aging demographic. In contrast, populations identifying as two or more races, Asian, and Hispanic are expected to grow significantly in the coming decades, fueled by higher birth rates and continued immigration. The two or more races group is projected to grow the fastest, followed by Asians and Hispanics. As the United States becomes increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, projections indicate that by 2060, approximately two in three children will be of a race or ethnicity other than non-Hispanic White.¹¹

Table 5. 2024 Missouri Population Estimates

Race and Hispanic Origin	%
White alone	82.4%
Black alone	11.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.6%
Asian alone	2.3%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone	0.2%
Two or more races	2.7%
Hispanic or Latino	5.3%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	77.9%

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2024 estimates, minority populations make up just over 20% of Missouri’s total population, with Black residents representing the largest minority group.¹³ Table 5 provides a detailed breakdown of the 2024 minority population estimates. Using U.S. Census data, a 2024 report compiled a list of the top 50 most diverse cities in Missouri with a population of more than 5,000, as shown in chart 2.¹⁴ The ten most diverse cities in Missouri are Grandview, St. John, Olivette, Overland, Kansas City, Raytown, St. Louis, Hazelwood, Maryland Heights, and University City, all located within the Kansas City or St. Louis metropolitan areas.

As with U.S. population projections, minority populations in Missouri are also projected to increase, but at a slower rate. Missouri’s minority population is projected to reach 30% in 2050 and nearly 32% by 2060.¹² With the increase in diversity in Missouri and across the United States comes the increasing focus on how to encourage minority participation in outdoor recreation. A report by the Outdoor Foundation found growing diversity in the outdoor recreation participant base, yet of the 175.8 million Americans who participated in

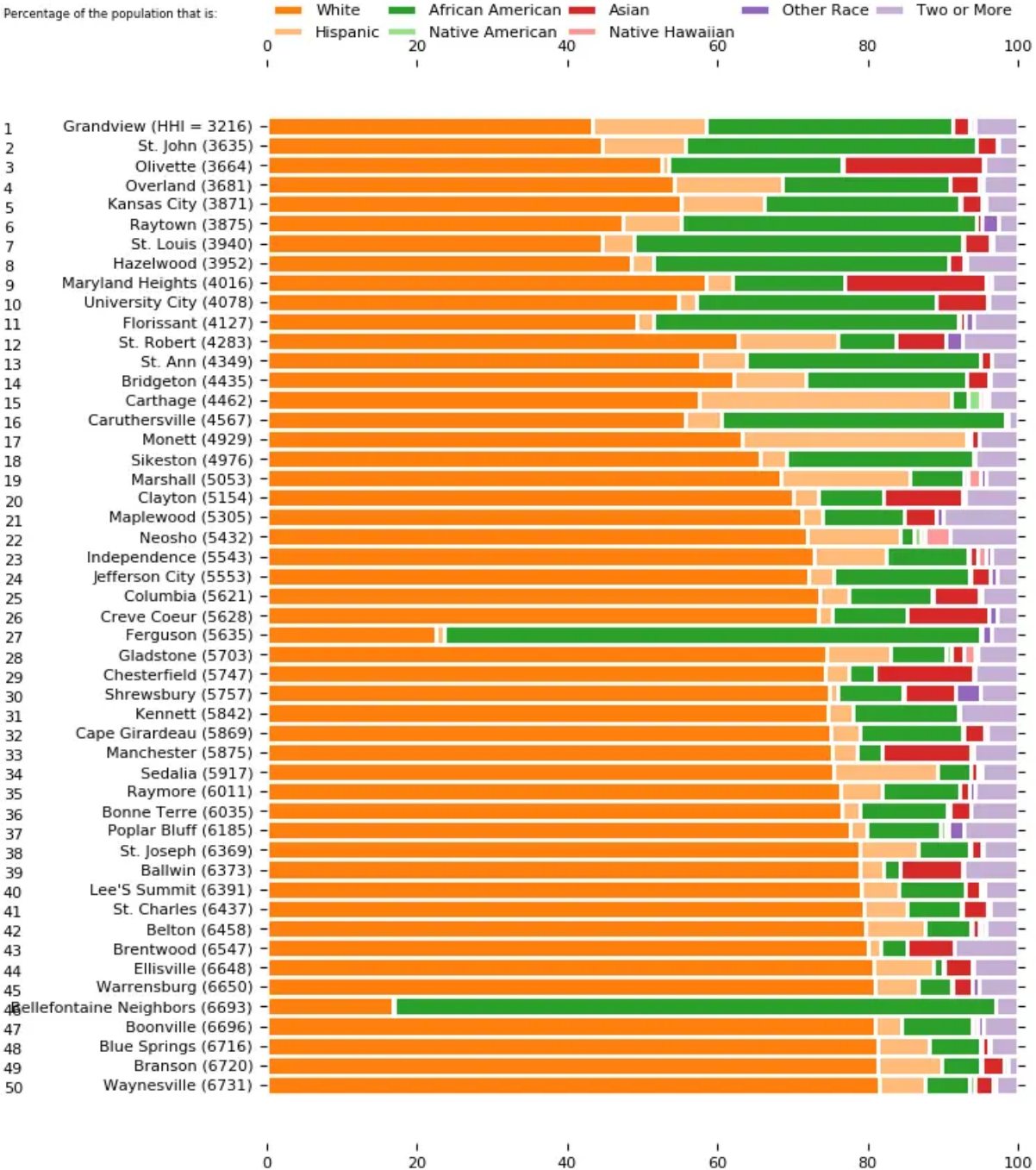
outdoor activities in 2023, the majority (69.7%) were white.¹⁵

The outdoor recreation industry has long been challenged by this disparity in outdoor recreation participation. Studies abound examining the lack of minority participation, but all agree that the reasons are varied and complex, ranging from cultural to socioeconomic to historical.^{16–20} The lack of minority representation can mean that some people feel unwelcome in the outdoors, fearing prejudice or feeling apprehensive about heading outside because they don’t see themselves reflected in the participants around them. This is compounded by the lack of representation in the outdoor industry and media. Minority communities may also face economic and accessibility constraints that prevent them from pursuing outdoor activities. Lack of transportation, lack of close-to-home facilities, lack of affordable opportunities, and lack of knowledge of places to go can create significant impediments to participation.

Recreation providers must continue to be cognizant of the obstacles and barriers that prevent all community members from taking advantage of recreation resources and plan outdoor facilities and programming accordingly. Differing cultural norms and use patterns may require providing non-traditional facilities. For instance, some minority groups are motivated by experiencing the outdoors with family and friends, so providing facilities that can accommodate large groups would have considerable appeal to these groups. Ensuring that close-to-home facilities are abundant in communities with a higher percentage of minority residents is also crucial, as is ensuring that adequate transportation is available to these facilities.

Chart 2. Diverse Cities in Missouri

Most Diverse Cities In Missouri



Source: <https://www.homesnacks.com/most-diverse-cities-in-missouri/>

Statewide Initiatives

To reach underserved communities throughout the state, MSP has established two urban outreach offices, one in St. Louis and the other in Kansas City. Staff in these offices work to increase engagement and access to Missouri state parks in urban and underrepresented communities throughout the state; to develop and implement statewide engagement initiatives; and to support facility-specific outreach, engagement, and accessibility efforts at parks and historic sites.

One such initiative is the Show Me MO State Parks program, a series of free summer day camps for youth ages 6-17. Locations of the day camps are in nearby state parks and historic sites that can be more easily reached from the St. Louis urban area. Participants are introduced to natural history, cultural history, and outdoor recreation activities through interpretive programs provided by park and site staff. Transportation, recreation equipment and supplies, and water are provided as needed.



Show Me MO State Parks Summer Camp Adventures

To address the issue of transportation costs, MSP has implemented the Missouri State Parks Bus Grant program. This program underwrites the cost of field trips for schools and nonprofit youth organizations to visit state parks and historic sites, to connect children with nature and their heritage. Pre-K-12th grade public schools, private schools, charter schools, and youth-based nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 status are eligible

for this program.

In addition to its urban outreach programming, MSP offers programs that teach outdoor skills to families, women, and those less comfortable in an outdoor setting. The Learn2 programs take place across the state, offering basic instruction in paddling, archery, rock climbing, and trout fishing. Glamp, hosted annually, is a unique opportunity for women to experience the outdoors and learn to be safe, confident, and comfortable in the outdoor environment. All sessions are taught by women and created for women and provide the opportunity to learn by doing.

Additionally, MSP and other state and federal agencies partner with Bass Pro's Wonders of Wildlife to host WOW National Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Schools. The WOW Schools are weekend programs designed to teach families how to enjoy a wide range of outdoor recreation activities while practicing personal safety and outdoor responsibility. Three schools are taught annually across the state, in St. Louis, Kansas City, and at Roaring River State Park near Cassville. The St. Louis and Kansas City schools are specifically geared toward underserved and minority participants living in these urban areas.

Another partnership initiative is the Urban Populations Outreach Program. Sponsored by the MPA, UPOP provides field trips to Missouri's state parks and historic sites for hundreds of urban youths from the St. Louis, Kansas City, and Columbia urban cores and several southwest Missouri communities. Helping children and families discover nature is a key part of the MDC's mission, as well. The department offers many outdoor skills classes and programs, such as Discover Nature Girls Camps for girls ages 11-15. Other programs include Kids Fishing Days and Discover Nature- Fishing Program events, which are designed to help families

and youth groups learn about fish, fish habitat, and fishing techniques. Each program event provides fishing equipment and instruction. Additionally, the department provides loaner rod-and-reel sets at various locations throughout the state.

MDC also works closely with schools through its Discover Nature Schools program. DNS teaches students from pre-K through high school about Missouri's native plants, animals, and habitats and connects them with nature, while meeting Missouri Learning Standards.

Student books, teacher guides, and training workshops are available at no charge to Missouri educators. Teachers who formally enroll in the DNS program are eligible for additional resources, including grant opportunities for equipment and field trips. Another program that MDC has introduced to Missouri schools is the Missouri National Archery in the Schools Program, modeled after the National Archery in the Schools Program, which teaches kids the basics of archery as a part of the school curriculum. MoNASP supports international-style target archery in 4th-through 12th-grade physical education classes during the school day.

Most recently, MDC partnered with the Columbia Public Schools District to establish a new environmental education center in mid-Missouri: the Boone County Nature School. This innovative center offers accessible, comprehensive environmental education through a unique place-based curriculum focused on the natural world, sustainable agriculture, outdoor skill development, and overall health and well-being. Located on a 111-acre campus within a conservation area, the school provides students with hands-on experiences in diverse ecosystems, including pollinator plots, a food forest, karst cave systems, restored prairie, and aquatic habitats. A team of Columbia Public Schools staff, along with an MDC educator, coordinates programming,

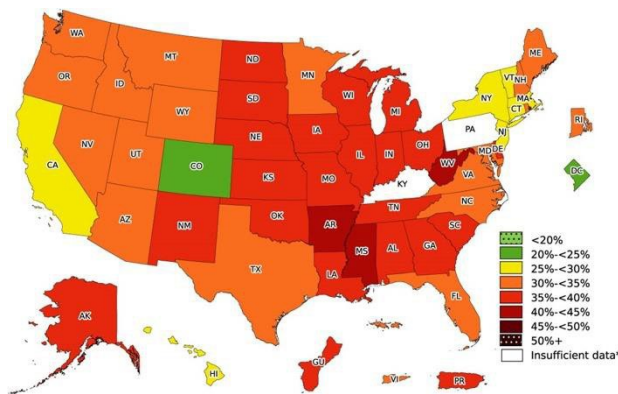
manages the grounds, and maintains the facilities.

A key component of the Nature School is its annual program serving 2,200 fifth-grade students. Over seven days each school year, students engage in meaningful, cross-curricular learning experiences that deepen environmental understanding and promote community engagement. As part of the curriculum, students design and implement local sustainability projects, helping them build lasting connections to their environment. In addition, BCNS hosts students from all grade levels for one-day field trips and summer programs. Outside of school hours, the Nature School is also available to the broader Boone County community.

Health and Wellness

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that the prevalence of obesity among U.S. adults was 40.3% in 2023.²¹ Men and women do not differ in obesity rates, but obesity prevalence was higher in adults aged 40-59 than in those aged 20-39 and 60 and older. Map 5 displays obesity rates among states.²² Compounding the obesity problem is the sedentary lives many adults lead. In 2020, only 24.2% of U.S. adults met the recommended physical activity guidelines for both aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities. Participation was higher among men (28.3%) than women (20.4%), and adherence declined with age.²³

Map 5. Adult Obesity Rate by State, 2023 (CDC)



The CDC report that obesity-related conditions, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer, are some of the leading causes of preventable, premature death in the U.S. Additionally, obesity is associated with approximately \$1,861 in excess annual medical costs per adult, contributing to a total of \$172.74 billion in annual healthcare expenditures in the United States.²⁴

Childhood obesity, too, is a serious problem in the United States, putting children and adolescents at risk for poor health and complications later in life. Childhood obesity significantly increases the risk of lifelong, costly health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, as well as reduced quality of life and disability. For children and adolescents aged 2-19 years, the prevalence of obesity is 19.7% nationally and affects about 14.7 million children and adolescents.²⁵ Obesity prevalence is 12.7% among 2-to-5-year-olds, 20.7% among 6- to-11-year-olds, and 22.2% among 12-to-19-year-olds. Obesity prevalence is highest in Hispanic children (26.2%) and non-Hispanic Black children (24.8%). Childhood obesity is estimated to cost the United States more than \$1.3 billion annually.²⁵

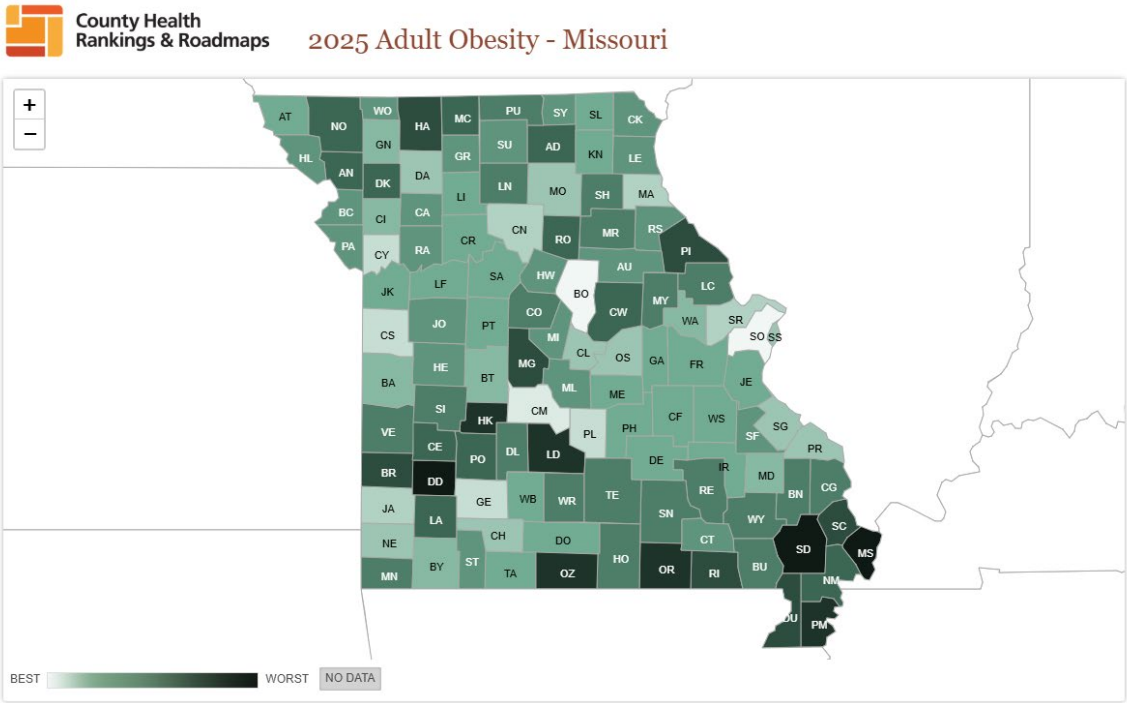
Missouri is not immune to this health crisis. In 2023, 35.3% of Missouri adults had obesity, ranking Missouri as having the 28th

highest adult obesity rate in the nation.²⁶ The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services reports that heart disease is the leading cause of death in Missouri,²⁷ while the CDC ranks Missouri as 10th in the nation for mortalities caused by heart disease.²⁸ Maps 6 and 7 depict, by county, the percentage of Missouri adults considered obese and physically inactive. Rates of obesity range from 33% to 45% of adults across counties in the state, while rates of physical inactivity range from 21% to 38% of adults across the state.²⁹

Regarding childhood obesity, Missouri is currently ranked 21st in the nation, with obesity affecting 15.5% of youth ages 10-17. Furthermore, 12.7% of Missouri's low-income youth ages 2-4, the most at-risk for disease and health disparity, are obese.³⁰

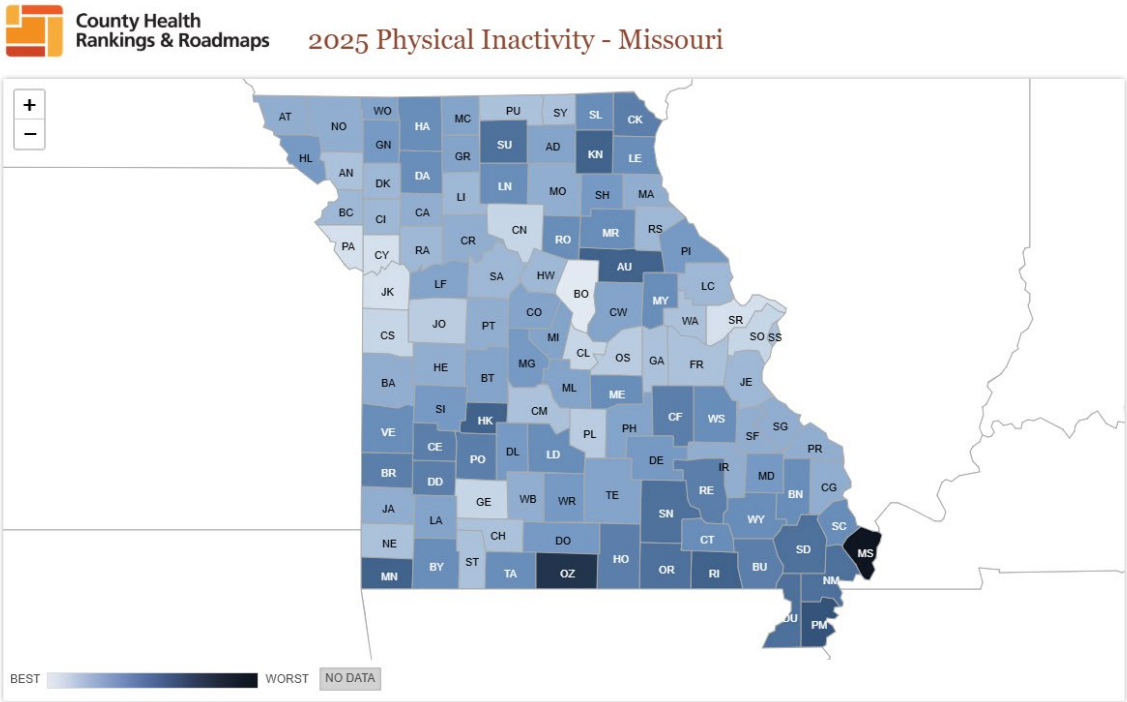
Physical health is only one aspect of the overall health and well-being crisis in America. Another major health concern is the prevalence of mental health issues in the United States. The National Alliance on Mental Illness reports that in 2021, approximately one in five adults in the United States (57.8 million or 22.8%) experienced mental illness, while one in 20 adults (14.1 million or 5.5%) experienced a serious mental illness that substantially interfered with or limited major life activities.³¹

Map 6. Adult Obesity, Missouri



Source: 2025 County Health Rankings.

Map 7. Adult Physical Inactivity, Missouri



Source: 2025 County Health Rankings.

In Missouri, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that 1,248,000 adults (26.5%) experienced some degree of mental illness, and 301,000 adults (6.4%) had a serious mental illness in 2022.³² Maps 8 and 9 depict, by county, the percentage of Missouri adults reporting frequent mental distress (e.g., experiencing poor mental health for 14 or more of the last 30 days) and feelings of loneliness. Rates of frequent mental distress range from 17% to 24% of adults across counties in the state, while rates of feeling lonely range from 29% to 37% of adults across the state.²⁹ These findings reflect broader concerns about adult mental health and social connection in the state.

Many studies and reports have documented the numerous physical and mental benefits of public parks.^{33–37} Regular outdoor activity provides a number of physical health benefits, including lowering blood pressure, reducing arthritis pain, contributing to weight loss, and lowering the risk of diabetes, certain cancers, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular disease. Natural settings rejuvenate and calm the mind, improving outlook and increasing positive affect. Both physical activity and time in outdoor settings reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Spending time in a park leads to an increase in dopamine levels, the hormone that contributes to positive moods, and a reduction in cortisol levels, a hormone released when the body feels stress.

There were short-term impacts on outdoor recreation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as many people turning to parks and green spaces as alternative activities for physical and mental well-being during lockdowns. It also caused a surge in first-time users, where people who had not previously participated in outdoor activities began visiting parks. Some parks faced issues with overcrowding and increased maintenance needs that could not be

adequately addressed during the height of the pandemic. In the longer term, there have been shifts in public prioritization of outdoor recreation as part of their leisure, but more data is needed to examine how the lasting changes have impacted the public values and needs in parks and recreation.^{36,38,39}

Given the vital role public park and recreation agencies play in addressing mental wellness, sedentary lifestyles, obesity and numerous other health-related issues in Missouri, priority should be given in areas with higher obesity, physical inactivity, mental distress, and loneliness to upgrading existing parks and developing additional facilities that contribute to increasing health and wellness for community members. Focus should also be on establishing collaborative partnerships between recreation providers, healthcare organizations, and other agencies to develop programming that encourages the use of parks and outdoor spaces for physical activity.

National, Statewide, and Local Initiatives

Recognizing that there is an increasing disconnect between communities and the outdoor world, and that this disconnect contributes to health problems and chronic disease, several national, statewide, and local initiatives have been implemented to use parks and public recreation spaces to combat these issues. The following summarizes a few of these initiatives in Missouri and elsewhere.

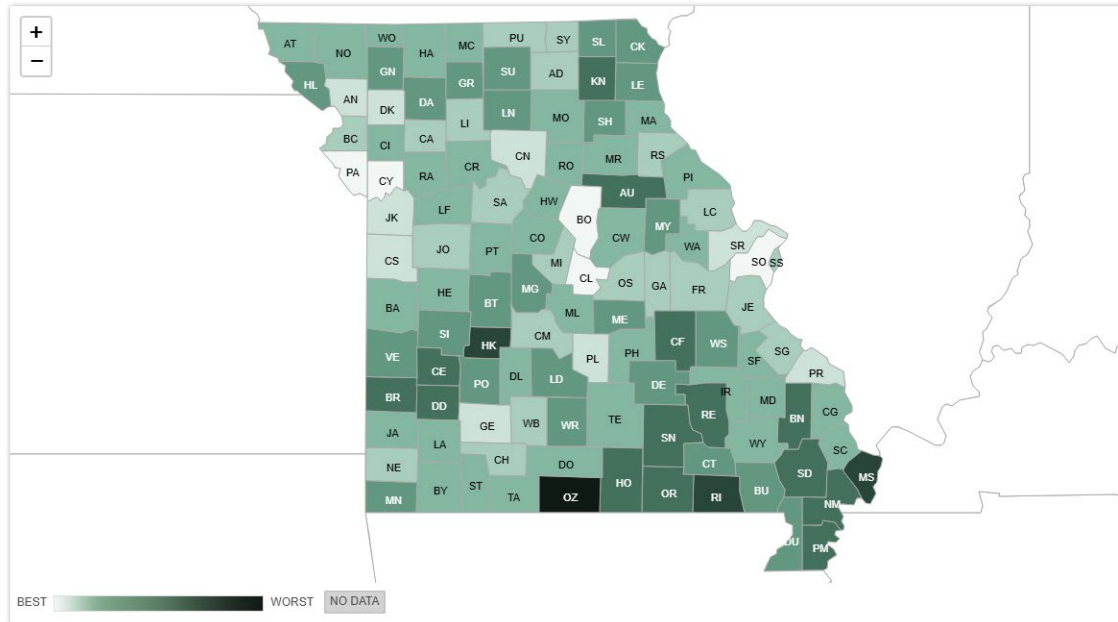
Prescription for Parks

Walk with a Doc, a grassroots effort that began in Ohio in 2005, is now a worldwide campaign to engage doctors with their patients through walking outside. Walk with a Doc events typically include a presentation by a physician, who then leads participants on a walk at their own pace. In Missouri, there are Walk with a Doc chapters in Albany, Columbia, Kansas City, Lee's Summit, Maryville, Olivette, Raytown, Springfield, and St. Louis.⁴⁰

Map 8. Adult Mental Distress, Missouri



2025 Frequent Mental Distress - Missouri



A similar program is the Park Prescription or “Park Rx” program, which encourages physicians or other healthcare providers to “prescribe” physical activity in park settings to their patients. Park Rx programs are gaining in popularity throughout the nation and are helping to motivate people to be active in community parks. Related to this movement, MDC launched a One Health initiative, partnering with the Missouri Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, MSP, and Park Rx America, with the goal to prescribe the health benefits of nature and share the positive impacts of conservation-related activities and programs offered in Missouri.

Eat Smart in Parks

Parks offer valuable opportunities for children and adults to enhance their health through exercise and recreation. However, the availability of high-calorie, salty foods at some parks can undermine these benefits. Given the large number of visitors to Missouri parks each year, providing healthier food options could have a meaningful impact on public health across the state.



Eat Smart in Parks is a statewide effort to promote healthier concession options in Missouri’s state and local parks.

A statewide effort to promote healthier eating options in Missouri’s state and local parks is

the Eat Smart in Parks program. ESIP is a collaborative initiative led by the University of Missouri Extension, DHSS, MSP, MPRA, Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition, and the Health Communication Research Center at the Missouri School of Journalism. The program develops model nutrition standards to help parks serve healthier concession options.

It also trains state and local park agencies to help them use the guidelines and provides materials to promote healthier food choices.

In addition to offering healthier concession items, local parks can assist with the provision of fresh fruits and vegetables in their communities by hosting farmers’ markets or by providing space on park grounds for community gardens. Indeed, according to a 2024 survey by the National Recreation and Park Association, more than one in five park and recreation agencies in the United States manage or administer farmers’ markets.⁴¹

One Missouri example of this is Clary-Shy Community Park in the City of Columbia. The park includes the MU Health Care Pavilion, which serves as the home of the Columbia Farmers Market. Within the Clary-Shy Community Park is Columbia’s Agriculture Park, a 10-acre space that hosts the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture’s production fields, public gardens, and educational areas showcasing a variety of food-growing techniques and urban ecosystems. Produce grown at the park is donated to food pantries and other hunger-relief organizations. The park features paved sidewalks that loop through the area, connecting to gravel paths that wind through a food forest, backyard demonstration gardens, and a farm-themed playground. Open year-round to the public, the park encourages exploration, learning, and connection with nature.

Fitness Stations

The establishment of fitness stations in parks is an emerging trend across the nation, as park and recreation providers increase efforts to offer multigenerational recreation facilities.⁴² The NRPA promotes the development and use of outdoor fitness stations, also known as outdoor gyms, in parks and recreational areas to encourage physical activity and enhance community well-being. These stations often include functional fitness rigs, cardio equipment, bodyweight stations, strength training areas, and obstacle courses. Some communities place fitness zones adjacent to playgrounds so users can keep their kids in sight while using these spaces.



Christy Park Fitness Station; City of St. Louis Parks Department.

Reflecting this national trend, Missouri has seen growing interest in the installation of fitness equipment in parks as communities look to expand recreational opportunities and health benefits for all ages.

Technology

The American Academy of Pediatrics has estimated that the average child spends upwards of seven hours watching television, browsing the Internet, and playing video games each day.⁴³ An increase in exposure to technology can often mean a decrease in physical activity. As children spend more time sitting in front of the TV or computer, they spend less time outside playing and burning calories. Additionally, greater screen

time often leads to increased snacking.⁴⁴

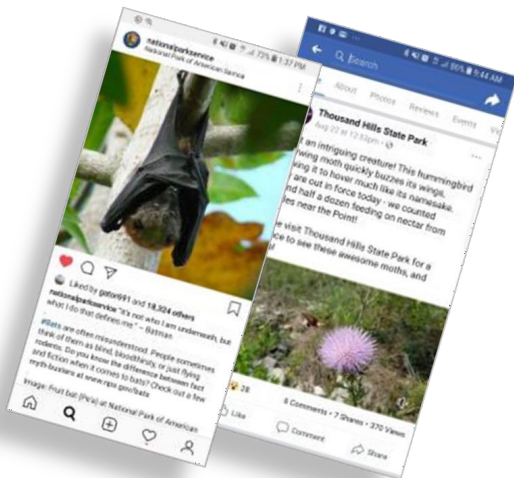
Other studies have linked excessive screen time with obesity, sleep disruptions, behavior problems, and attention difficulties.⁴⁵

According to a 2024 Pew Research Center survey, 95% of teens report having or having access to a smartphone, 88% to a desktop or laptop computer, 83% to a gaming console, and 70% to a tablet. These mobile connections are, in turn, fueling more persistent online activities: Nearly half of teens say they are online almost constantly, a 24% jump from a decade ago.

Older teens are more likely to be online almost constantly than younger teens. Nearly half of 15- to 17-year-olds say they are online this frequently, compared to 38% of 13- to 14-year-olds. YouTube is the most popular platform among teens, with 90% reporting that they use it. TikTok is the second most used platform, with about 60% of teens saying they use it. Overall, 73% of teens visit YouTube daily, including 15% who describe their usage as “almost constant.” Around 60% of teens visit TikTok daily, with 16% saying they are on it almost constantly. While a substantial majority of girls report having access to a game console at home (76%), the figure is even higher among boys, with roughly nine in 10 reporting the same.⁴⁶

The presence of technology in parks can oftentimes spark debate between those who feel it has no place in park settings, which are meant to be a refuge from the modern world, and those who are concerned about maintaining relevancy to a younger generation. To keep up with technological trends, many park and recreation agencies maintain a social media presence through Facebook, Twitter, park-based apps, and other platforms. Additionally, many parks provide charging stations and Wi-Fi access. Another form of technology that is seeing an increase in parks is the use of drones.

Agencies are mixed in their reception of this technology. Some provide specific locations within parks, similar to radio-controlled aircraft fields, or allow the use of drones by permit only. Others ban the use outright, citing concerns with noise pollution and disruption to park visitors seeking peace and solitude.



Technology, and social media in particular, is having a profound impact on the way we recreate in the outdoors. The proliferation of smartphone apps such as Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat has given rise to a spate of outdoor selfies and other carefully crafted photographic images of scenic landscapes and outdoor adventures. Critics of this phenomenon argue that such images aren't "true" and that the intent behind the images isn't so much about connecting to nature as it is about getting the perfect shot. Additionally, concern has been expressed that outdoor social media tagging has led to irresponsible or illegal behavior and, in some cases, injury or death. Other critics cite concerns over the prevalence of geotagging and the resulting exponential increase in visitation, oftentimes to the detriment of fragile ecosystems or unique landscapes that don't have the developed infrastructure to sustain the influx of visitors.⁴⁷⁻⁵¹

On the other hand, the upside of the

amplified (and free) exposure to the outdoor world that social media provides has led to a renewed interest in national parks, state parks, and other outdoor spaces. Increased visitation oftentimes equates to increased user fees and other revenue sources. Outdoor recreation agencies are learning to capitalize on this free exposure by interspersing interpretive messages amongst the breathtaking photographic images, messages that encourage responsible outdoor use and other stewardship concepts. In the same vein, followers of the Leave No Trace philosophy, which espouses seven principles for minimizing impact in outdoor use, have recommended an eighth "digital" principle of using discretion before geotagging a location to reduce overuse impact. And, some advocates have suggested that social media can aid in integrating and diversifying the face of outdoor users, as well as serve as a way to attract and draw in underserved youth.⁵²⁻⁵⁵

According to the National Environmental Education Foundation, some mobile apps help connect people to the outdoors by offering ideas on where to go and what to do outside.⁵⁶ Examples include *Oh, Ranger!*, a park finder for nearby public lands; *iNaturalist*, which lets users to upload and identify photos of plants and animals along with their locations; *ParkPassport*, developed by the National Park Trust to guide users to local, state, and national parks; and *MO Outdoors*, offered by MDC to help users explore outdoor recreation opportunities in Missouri. These and many other apps are designed to encourage outdoor exploration and engagement.

Accessibility

According to the CDC, 28.7% of U.S. residents (70 million people) have some type of disability, including those related to cognition, mobility, hearing, vision, self-care, or independent living.⁵⁷ While disability is most common among older adults, a higher

percentage of younger adults (ages 18–44) reported a disability in 2022 (23.6%) compared to 2021 (21.2%). Although disability does not necessarily mean poor health, individuals with disabilities often experience health disparities and are more likely to report certain health conditions, such as depression, obesity, smoking, diabetes, heart disease, and long COVID. For example, in 2022, 43.6% of people with disabilities reported experiencing depression, compared to 13.7% of people without disabilities. Missouri’s population percentage is similar, with 31% of adults (over 1.5 million people) having a disability in 2022.⁵⁸

Parks and recreation facilities have an active role in combating these health-related issues and fostering societal inclusion.⁵⁹ Public park and recreation agencies across the United States recognize the importance of providing recreation opportunities to individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities. In a 2018 report, NRPA found that the majority (74%) of agencies provide programs and activities that serve individuals with disabilities, while 62% have programs and activities that serve individuals with cognitive disabilities.⁶⁰

Although significant gains have been made in the inclusion of individuals with disabilities since ADA was written into law in 1990, more needs to be done to make sure parity in facility and programming provision. As more emphasis is placed on inclusion and diversity in public recreation spaces, a movement to incorporate universal design and provide inclusive facilities has begun to grow nationally, as well as in Missouri. An example of this is the increase in the number of inclusive playgrounds being installed in parks and schoolyards across the state. Inclusive playgrounds go beyond just meeting the ADA requirements to making certain the physical and social inclusion of people of all ages and

abilities. Inclusive playgrounds provide facilities that stimulate physical, cognitive, communicative, social/emotional, and sensory development. Future LWCF funding priorities should continue to emphasize such facilities as all-inclusive playgrounds and upgrade support facilities like restrooms and shelters to meet ADA requirements.

Local Initiatives

Missouri is home to numerous inclusive playgrounds designed to accommodate children of all abilities. Notable examples include Faust Park in Chesterfield, Tree Top Playground in the City of Clayton, Zachary’s Playground in Lake St. Louis, Tilles Park in Ladue, Brendan’s Playground in O’Fallon, and Woodridge Park in Columbia, just to name a few. Among these, Zachary’s Playground features a fully accessible spray park, ADA-accessible swings, a music section for auditory stimulation, ramped toddler play zones, climbing nets with custom seats, and roller slides designed for children with cochlear implants.

In addition to local accessibility improvements, statewide initiatives have significantly advanced inclusive infrastructure. The MDC, for instance, has worked to address barriers that limit outdoor access for people with disabilities by constructing new facilities and renovating older ones to improve accessibility to buildings, natural resources, and shooting ranges. MDC also provides assistive devices such as adaptive fishing equipment and all-terrain wheelchairs for participants at MDC events. Similarly, MSP offers beach and track chairs to assist visitors with mobility challenges and partners with various organizations to provide American Sign Language interpreters at events held in state parks and historic sites.



Zachary's Playground, Lake Saint Louis

Economic Sustainability

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation generated \$1.2 trillion in economic output in 2023, supporting 5 million jobs.⁶¹ In Missouri, the outdoor recreation industry supported nearly 90,000 direct jobs and contributed \$9.9 billion in value added to the state's GDP.⁶²

Regional and local park and recreation agencies make up a significant share of this economic impact. A report by the National Recreation and Park Association found that, in 2019, local public park and recreation agencies across the United States generated over \$217.8 billion in economic activity and supported nearly 1.3 million jobs through operational and capital improvement spending.⁶³ In Missouri, these agencies contributed more than \$3.6 billion in economic activity, supported over 23,000 jobs, and generated over \$1.1 billion in labor income.

Unfortunately, most agencies remain underfunded, a chronic reality of the country's park systems. Furthermore, federal investment in outdoor recreation continues to lag national spending growth. According to a recent study by the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable and Southwick Associates, outdoor recreation receives only 0.16% of the federal budget despite contributing 2.2% to

the U.S. GDP.⁶⁴ Additionally, deferred maintenance and operational gaps are projected to grow, further burdening already under-resourced agencies.

There is strong citizen support for publicly funded parks and recreation facilities in Missouri, as evidenced by the 80% approval rating of the recently reauthorized Parks, Soils, and Water Sales Tax. Originally approved by voters in 1984, the tax has since been renewed by wide margins in 1988, 1996, 2006, and most recently in 2016, when it passed in every county. This tax accounts for about three-fourths of the state park system's operating budget and will expire in 2028 if not approved again by voters in 2026. Additionally, five counties and 233 municipalities within Missouri have established local sales taxes to fund parks and stormwater improvements.

Despite this progress, many parks and recreation agencies continue to face inconsistent funding. Budget shortfalls are especially common in smaller Missouri communities, many of which are experiencing population decline and a shrinking tax base. This issue is particularly acute in low-income communities, where parks and recreation facilities are most needed but least affordable. These communities often struggle to secure basic maintenance funding, let alone the matching funds required for future LWCF grants. Maps 10 and 11 show county-level data on median household income and the percentage of children living in poverty across Missouri. Median household income ranges from \$41,300 to \$98,800 across counties in the state, while child poverty rates vary from 6% to 36%, with a statewide average of 15%.²⁹

Environment and Stewardship

Of the myriad benefits provided by public outdoor spaces, the environmental benefits are among the most critical. Parks, by their

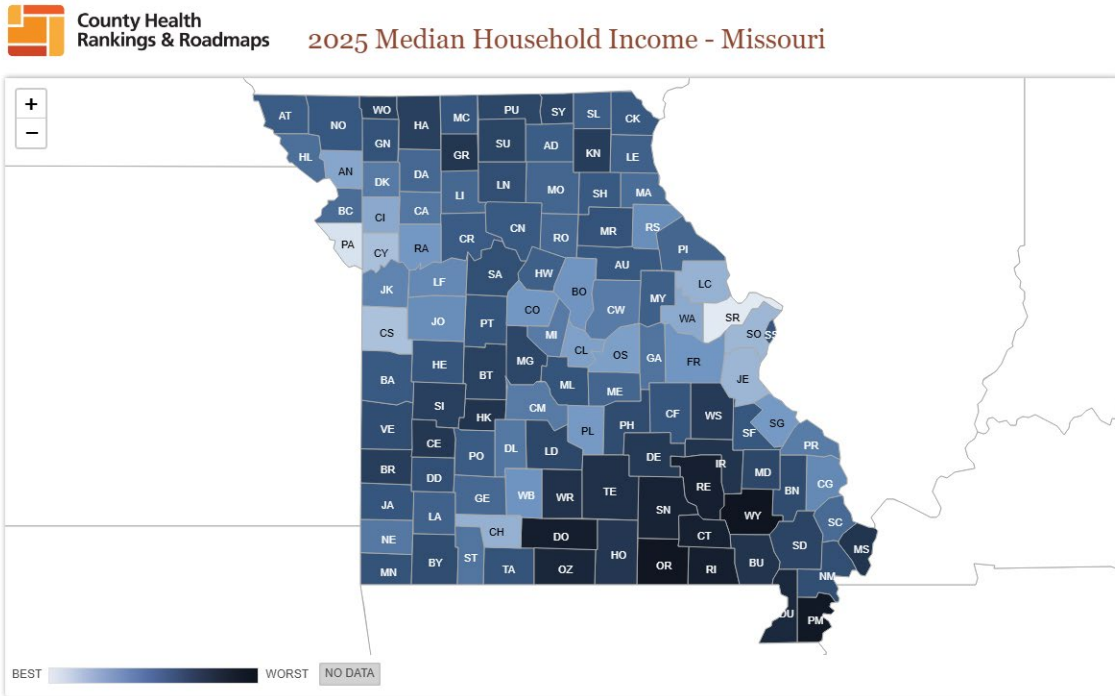
very nature, preserve and protect public land and open spaces. Additionally, parks contribute to providing clean air and clean water, as well as mitigating flooding and extreme weather events. Trees, shrubs, and vegetation within parks release oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide and pollutants that cause respiratory problems and corrode and damage buildings. Tree canopies, garden vegetation, grassy areas, and other green spaces in parks capture and filter rainwater, reducing the amount of oil, salt, and pollutants flowing from roads and lawns into nearby waterways and groundwater. Parks also transport and store stormwater runoff that could otherwise cause costly flood damage and environmental pollution. And, in many cases, new parks and open spaces can repurpose or reclaim an area destroyed by a natural disaster. As one of the largest landowners in a community or region, parks and recreation agencies are uniquely positioned to capitalize on their very public forum to address other environmental issues and act as role models for sustainability and stewardship. For instance, native landscaping using drought-tolerant plants and geography not only reduces turf maintenance and saves taxpayer dollars but, with an accompanying interpretive message, encourages park visitors to adopt similar practices at home.

Environmental education plays a critical role in preparing Missourians to understand and address the state's conservation challenges, from protecting water quality to conserving natural habitats and promoting sustainable land use.⁶⁵⁻⁶⁷ Offered at many Missouri state parks and nature centers across the state, environmental education helps people of all ages connect with nature, develop stewardship values, and make informed decisions that support healthy communities and ecosystems. As Missouri continues to grow and face environmental pressures, expanding access to high-quality environmental education, especially in

outdoor, place-based settings, will be essential for fostering a more resilient and environmentally literate population.

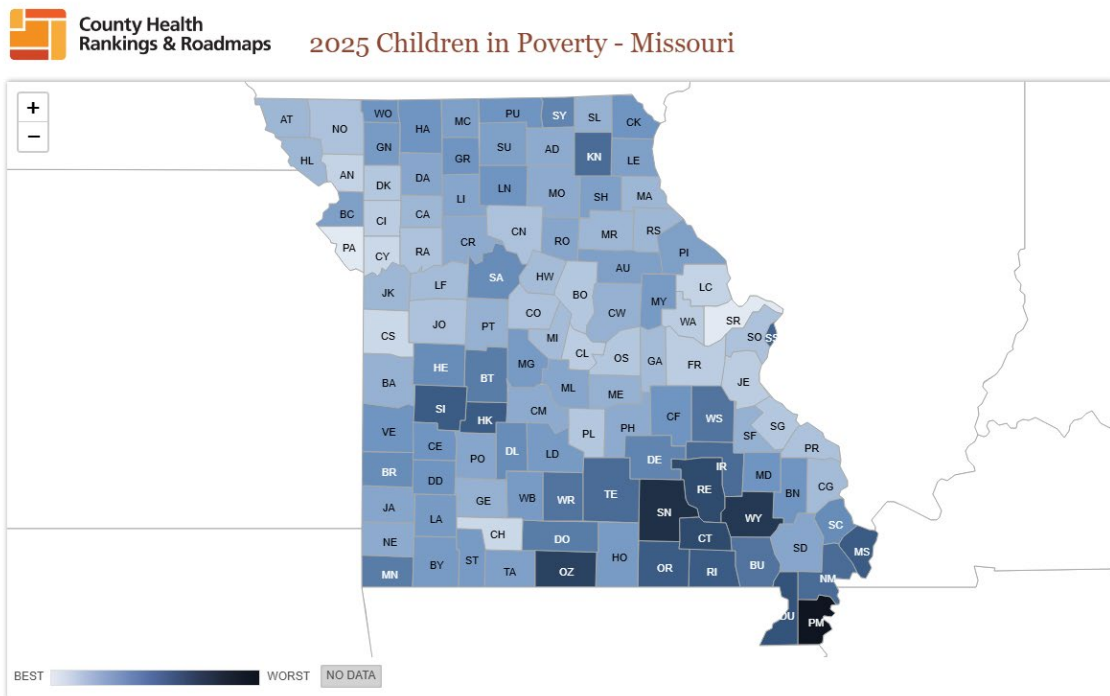
According to the National Recreation and Park Association's 2022 Sustainability Report, while only 43% of park and recreation agencies operate under a formal sustainability plan, developed either by the agency (14%) or its governing jurisdiction (29%), sustainability remains a widespread priority. In fact, 98% of agencies report taking actions to reduce energy and water use or protect natural habitats, even without a plan in place. Common sustainability practices include planting trees, transitioning to native and climate-adaptable vegetation, updating and retrofitting buildings and park infrastructure, reducing reliance on carbon-based energy, minimizing landfill waste, managing stormwater through green infrastructure, and cutting overall water consumption. Despite growing commitment to sustainability, many agencies still face significant implementation challenges. Key barriers include limited financial resources, staffing shortages, and the need to stay current with emerging technologies and best practices. Nearly 80% of agencies rely on their operating budgets to support sustainability initiatives, and 68% also draw from capital budgets to fund related projects.⁶⁸

Map 10. Median Household Income, Missouri



Source: 2025 County Health Rankings.

Map 11. Children in Poverty, Missouri



Source: 2025 County Health Rankings.



An interpretive panel at Rock Bridge Memorial State Park demonstrates the importance of incorporating low-impact development, such as using pervious pavers in place of concrete or asphalt. An adjacent rain garden is planted with native species attractive to pollinators.

Future grant funding should prioritize projects that emphasize sustainability and environmental stewardship. This includes initiatives that incorporate native and climate-adaptable landscaping, prevent the spread of invasive species, and integrate sustainable design elements, such as infrastructure updates that reduce water use, manage stormwater, decrease reliance on carbon-based energy, and limit landfill waste. Projects that use recycled materials or retrofit existing facilities to improve sustainability should also be prioritized. Additional focus should be given to projects that minimize environmental impact by developing within a smaller footprint, using permeable surfaces, or installing energy-efficient mechanisms such as timers or sensors. Projects that incorporate renewable energy sources, such as solar or geothermal systems, are also encouraged. Finally, priority should be placed on grant proposals that support the acquisition of recreation lands that preserve wetlands, wildlife habitat, and other critical natural areas.

Statewide Initiatives

A primary component of the MSP mission is to preserve areas that best exemplify the natural heritage of the state, which has led to a long

history of rigorous resource management practices. However, with the ever-increasing resource threats posed by invasive and exotic species, habitat loss, undesirable encroachment, and other ecosystem degradation, resource managers are implementing a series of management initiatives that have been recently adopted to ensure a more comprehensive stewardship strategy. These initiatives include:

- Review and update the natural resource management plan for each facility that lists special resources and management goals specific to the individual facility.
- Review and update exotic species control plans for each facility.
- Require each facility manager and naturalist to engage in at least 50 hours of stewardship activity annually.
- Continuously engage in prescribed burn activities at facilities where prescribed burns are required.
- Continue to inventory flora and fauna species and record new species in the system-wide Natural Resource Inventory Database System for each facility.
- Conduct annual Wild Area and Natural Area assessments at facilities that contain areas with these special designations.
- Require naturalists to become familiar with indicator plant species for their facility's natural communities and engage in at least 40 hours of biological identification activity.

MDC also implements a wide range of environmental stewardship initiatives to preserve the state's natural heritage and engage communities in conservation. Key efforts include community conservation partnerships that help integrate nature into urban planning, and private land stewardship programs like the Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program, which provides public access to privately owned lands for outdoor recreation. MDC also

collaborates with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to deliver the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which includes Native Forages Initiatives that encourage sustainable land use through increasing forage from native species.

MDC's conservation work further extends to habitat and species management through wetland restoration, invasive species control, and the recovery of imperiled ecosystems. Public education and citizen engagement are also central to MDC's mission, with programs like the Missouri Master Naturalist Program empowering volunteers to support conservation goals. Additionally, outreach efforts such as the Trees Work campaign raise awareness about the environmental, economic, and social benefits of forests, reflecting MDC's comprehensive approach to sustaining Missouri's natural resources.

Summary

An increasing disconnect between communities and the outdoors is contributing to health problems and chronic disease. Public park and recreation agencies play a vital role in addressing these societal and health-related issues but are hampered by a lack of funding needed to provide facilities that keep up with the changing demographics and demands of their citizenry. LWCF grant funding can assist by prioritizing projects that meet the needs of underserved communities. Agencies should prioritize programming that targets specific user populations, as well as use technology to attract a diverse user base and incorporate sustainability and stewardship in development projects.

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RECREATION NEEDS

The process for gathering public input for the *2026-31 Show Me Missouri Outdoors* plan used a multi-faceted approach to engage two key stakeholder groups: park visitors and recreation providers. In order to give voice to all Missouri residents and to assist land managers and recreation providers in making decisions on their behalf, the Show Me plan placed equal emphasis on hearing directly from park users and recreation providers. This dual perspective gives a clearer picture of where provider goals and public interests align and where they differ, helping inform future investments in outdoor spaces that better serve all Missourians.

To gather input on public recreation needs, online state-wide surveys were implemented in February through March 2025 to engage park visitors and park service providers. For park visitors, a link to the survey was shared through MSP's social media channels, inviting Missouri residents to weigh in on what matters most to their recreation activities. For instance, the survey asked about the types of amenities they value, barriers that prevent them from visiting parks more often, and ideas for future improvements. Another survey was conducted with recreation providers, such as city and county park

departments, planners, and administrators, to understand their insights into the current status of recreation service provision and availability. Their responses offered a broader view of trends in park usage, maintenance challenges, and resource needs across different communities.

Resident Survey

The resident survey was intended for the general public of Missouri and was shared on MSP's social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (previously Twitter). The posts gave a brief overview of the SCORP's intention of outlining public recreation opportunities in the state and asked for anonymous input on these priorities through a 'five-minute survey.' The survey was also distributed through a MoDNR news release and the MSP eFriends listserv. Using Qualtrics, the survey remained open for exactly three weeks and gathered 737 responses. A copy of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix A, and survey results are provided in Appendix C. Respondents represented a wide geographic distribution, coming from 239 unique ZIP codes across Missouri. About 44.0% described the area they live in as suburban, 43.2% as rural, and 12.8% as urban.

Respondents represented a broad range of age groups, with the largest share between 35–44 years old (25.4%), followed by 45–54 (22.1%), and 25–34 (19.4%). Most respondents identified as White (66.4%). Other racial and ethnic groups represented included Native American or Alaska Native (1.2%), Asian (0.9%), Hispanic or Latino(a) (0.8%), Black or African American (0.4%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.1%). About 5.2% of respondents preferred not to disclose their race or ethnicity. Most respondents identified as female (57.6%), followed by male (36.9%).

Over one-third of respondents (36.2%) reported annual household incomes over \$100,000. Other common income brackets included \$75,000–\$99,999 (19.4%) and \$50,000–\$74,999 (18.1%). The majority (44.0%) reported being employed full-time. Retirees made up 14.8% of respondents, while 6.5% were employed part-time, and 5.8% were self-employed. Most respondents (58.0%) reported having no children under 18 in their household. Among those with children, 18.4% had two children, 13.0% had one, and smaller percentages reported larger household sizes.

Most respondents reported being frequent participants in outdoor recreation. Approximately 43.4% indicated they participate two to three times per week, while 30.0% reported participating daily. Over the past year, respondents visited a wide range of recreation areas. The most frequently visited were state parks (80.1%), local parks (76.0%), conservation areas (72.5%), non-local parks (65.7%), and neighborhood parks (58.3%). When asked which type of recreation area they visit most often, respondents most commonly cited state parks (22.3%) and parks in their own town or city (22.1%). Travel distance to recreation areas varied widely. About 21.7% of respondents reported traveling 6 to 10 miles, while 24.4% traveled more than 25 miles. Others typically traveled

2 to 5 miles (19.7%), 11 to 25 miles (19.2%), or less than 2 miles (14.9%). The vast majority of respondents (83%) reported using a car to reach parks or outdoor areas. Walking was the second most common mode (8.1%), followed by bicycling (4.6%).

Respondents were asked to select which activities they typically engage in when participating in outdoor recreation. The most common activities included walking (71.6%), hiking (64.3%), camping (50.5%), relaxing, reading, or just hanging out (50.3%), and birdwatching or wildlife viewing (46.4%).

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance or unimportance of various reasons for spending time in a park or outdoor area on a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). The most commonly cited reasons as “very important” were **to improve my mental health (66.6%)**, **to be close to nature (65.2%)**, and **to get fresh air (58.3%)**. Results from this question and responses to other motivations can be found in Chart 3.

Respondents were asked to rate how much specific factors limited their ability to visit parks and recreation areas as often as they would like, using a scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a great deal). Overall, respondents did not report major constraints to their recreation. The most frequently cited constraint with “a great deal” of impact was having **too many other commitments competing for their time (13.8%)**. A smaller portion of respondents (6.1%) indicated that **a lack of activities of interest in local parks** was a constraint. Respondents were also able to write in other factors that limit their visits to parks and recreation areas, in which **accessibility, safety, and weather** were frequently cited. Results from this question can be found in Chart 4.

Chart 3: Resident Reasons to Spend Time in a Park or Outdoor Area

Q6: How important or unimportant are the following reasons for you to spend time in a park or outdoor area?

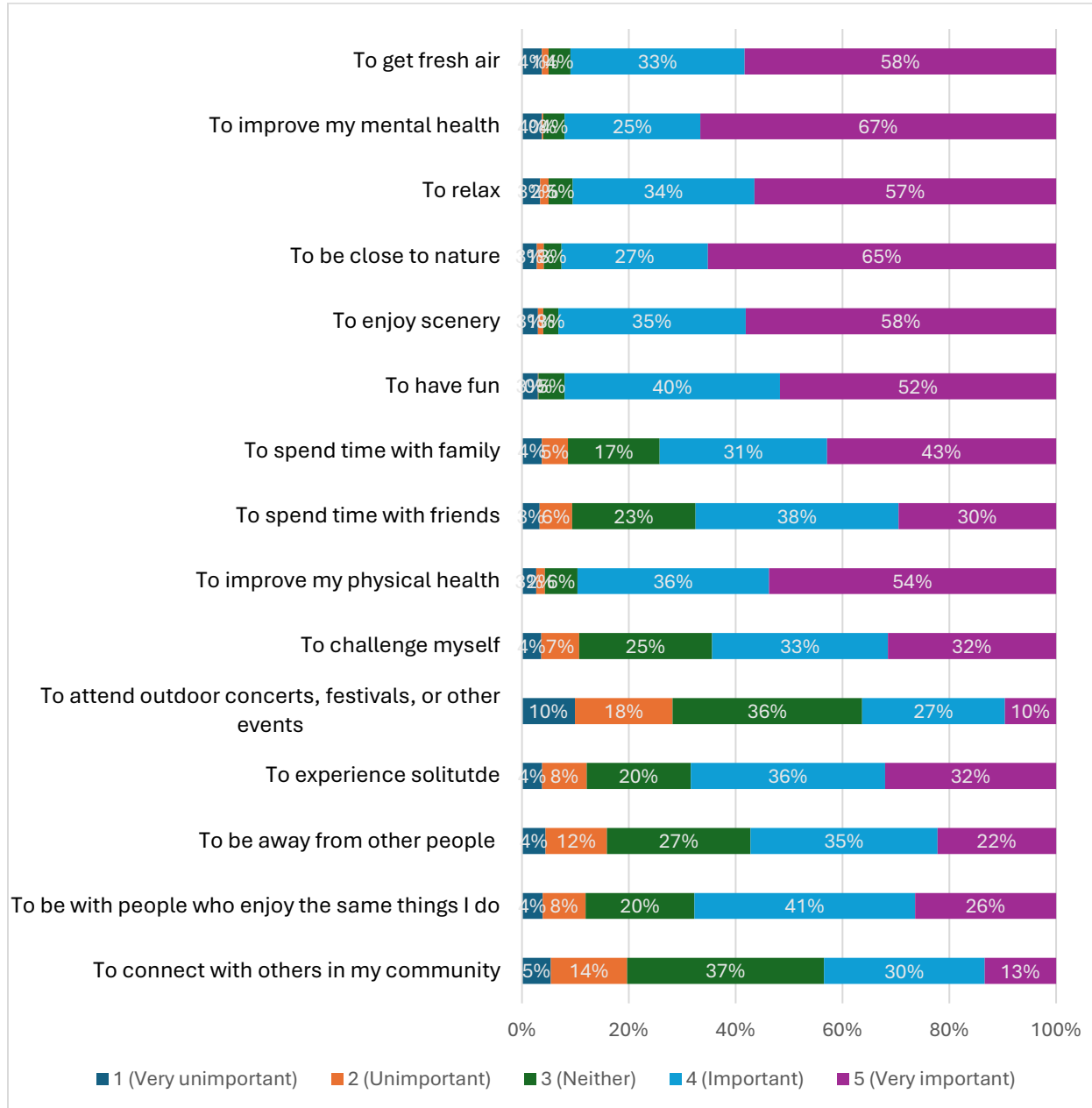
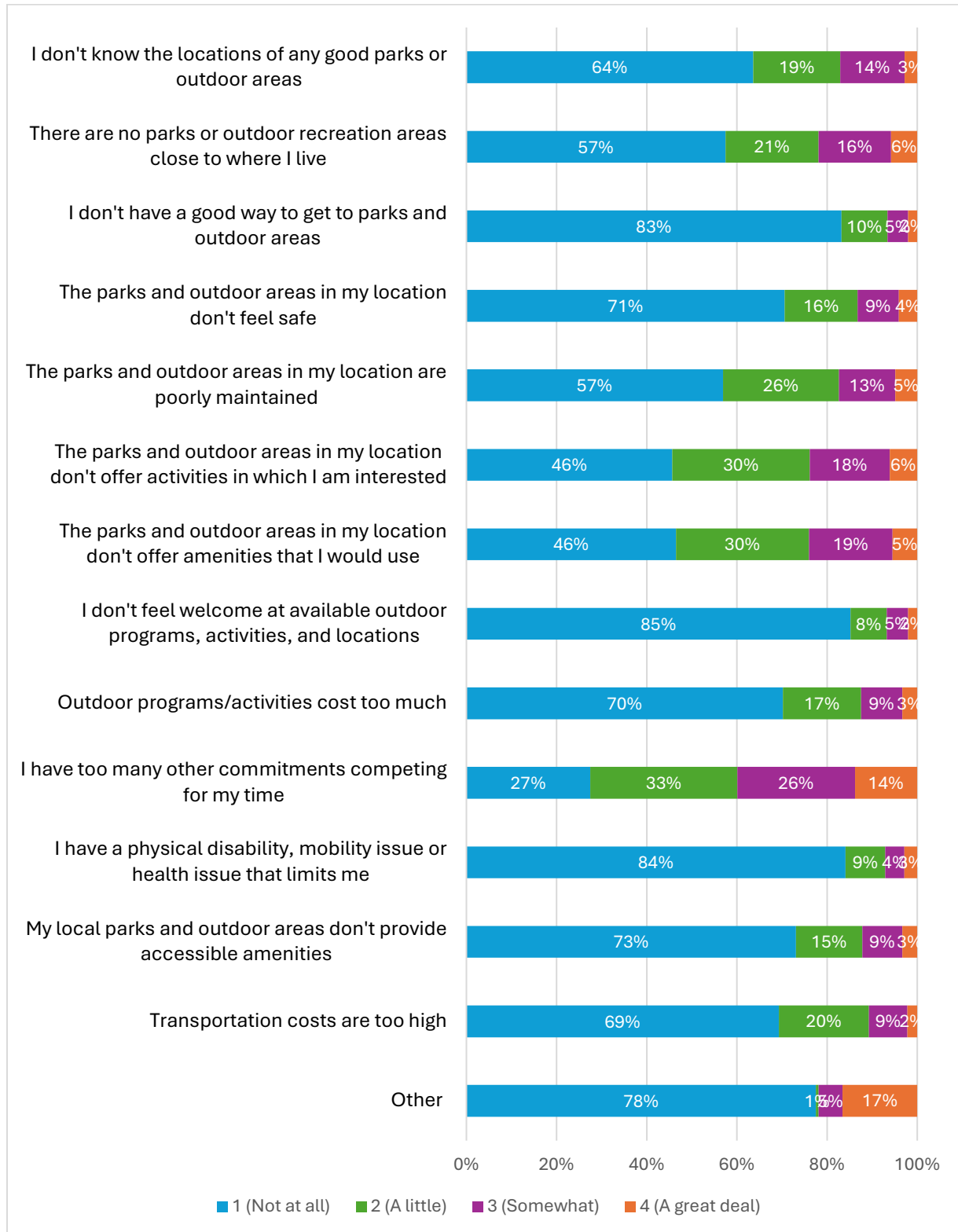


Chart 4: Resident Constraints to Participating in Outdoor Recreation

Q7: To what extent do the following keep you from going to parks and recreation areas more often?



An Importance-Performance Analysis was conducted using resident responses about the importance and satisfaction levels of various park amenities. Based on these responses, each amenity was placed into one of four quadrants: 'Keep Up the Good Work' (high importance, high performance), 'Low Priority' (low importance, low performance), 'Possible Overkill' (low importance, high

Residents were also asked to rate the importance of various potential improvements for their outdoor recreation areas if additional funding were available, on a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). The “very important”

improvement options were to **improve/expand existing trails (42.6%); build new trails that connect neighborhoods, schools, and parks**

(40.2%); and repair older park facilities like restrooms and shelters (38.0%). These results can be found in Chart 8.

Chart 5: Resident Importance of Amenities Provided in Parks and Outdoor Spaces
Q9: How important or unimportant is it that your spaces provide the following amenities?

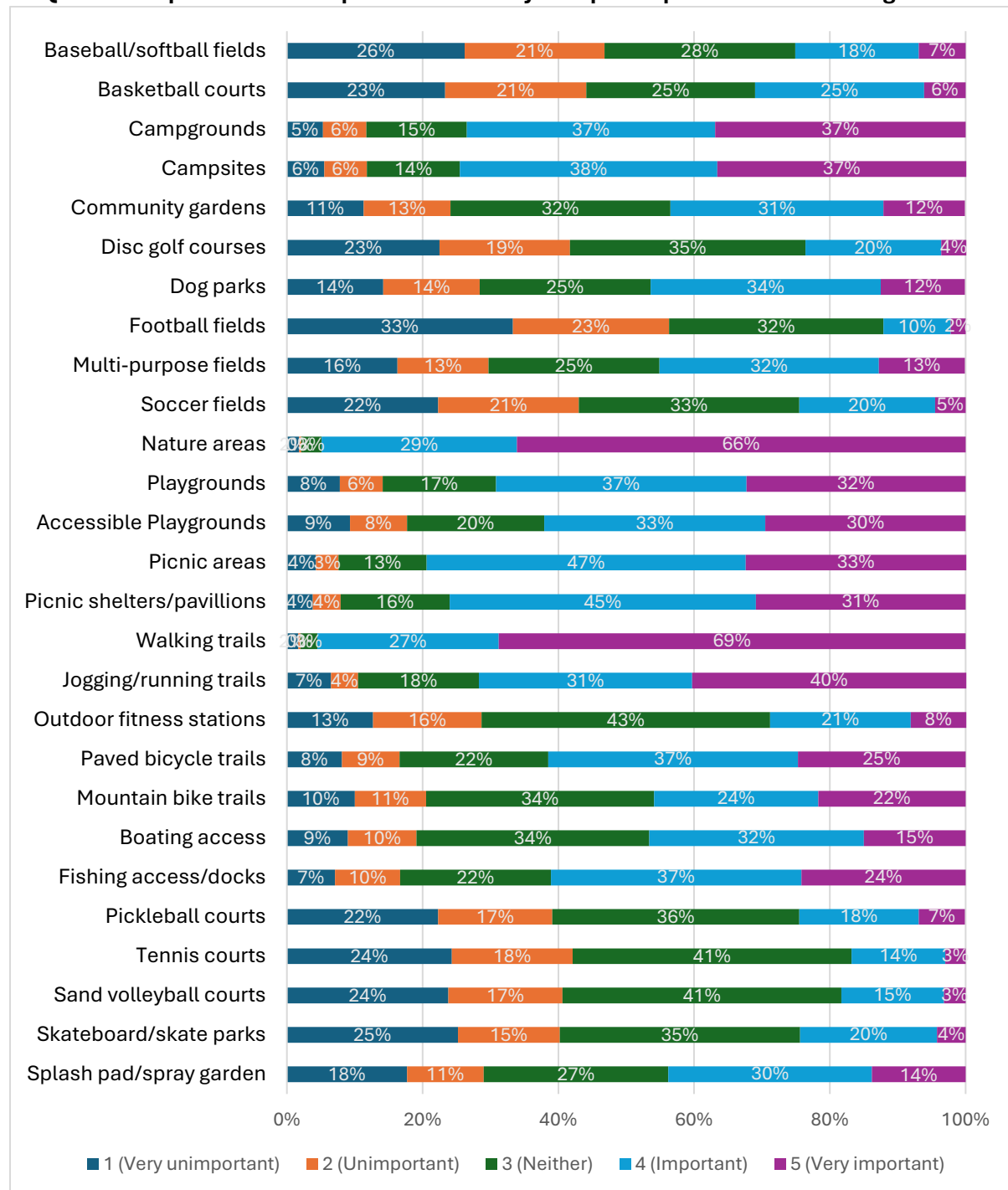


Chart 6: Resident Satisfaction with Amenities Provided in Parks and Outdoor Spaces

Q11: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following amenities?

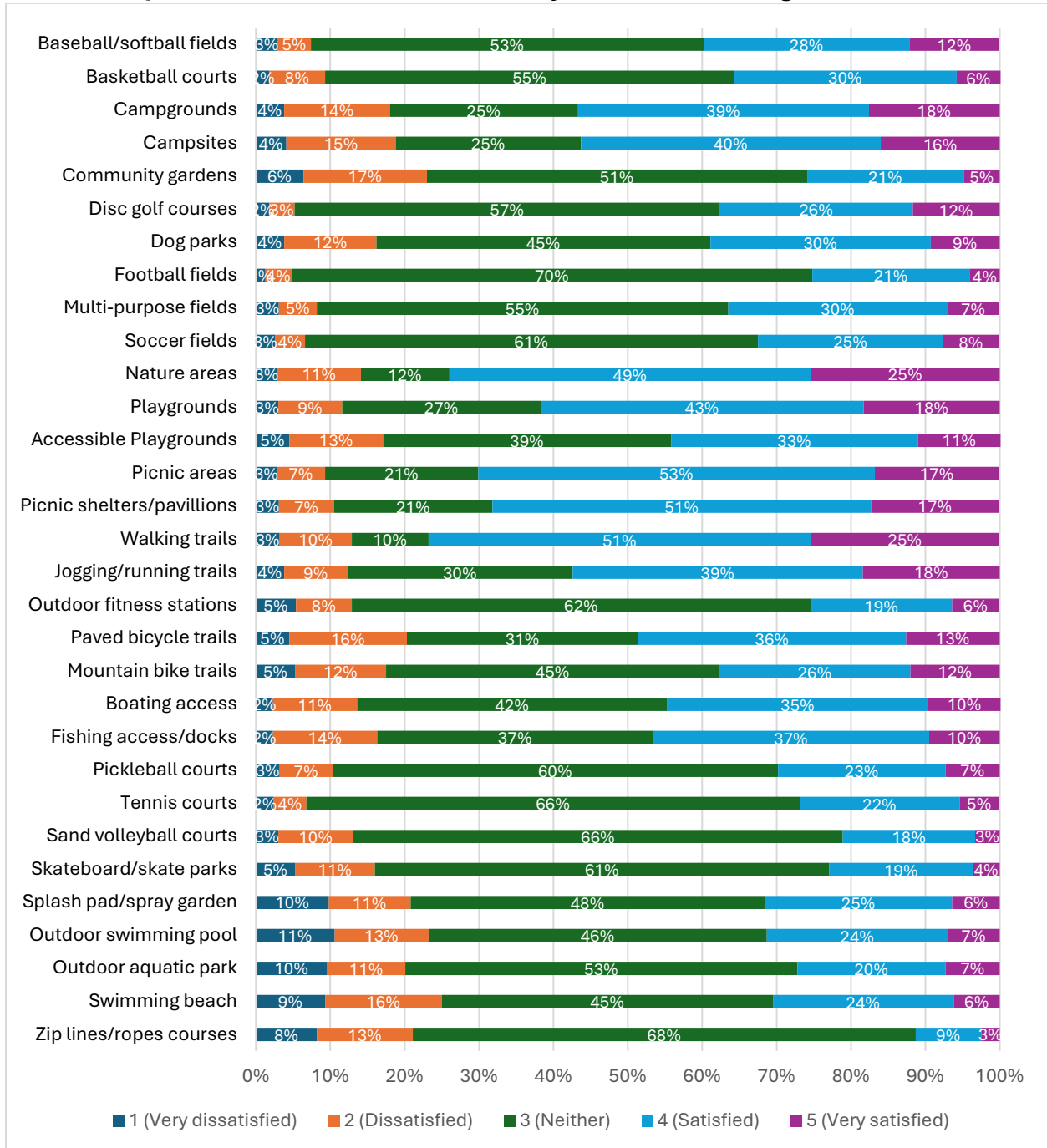
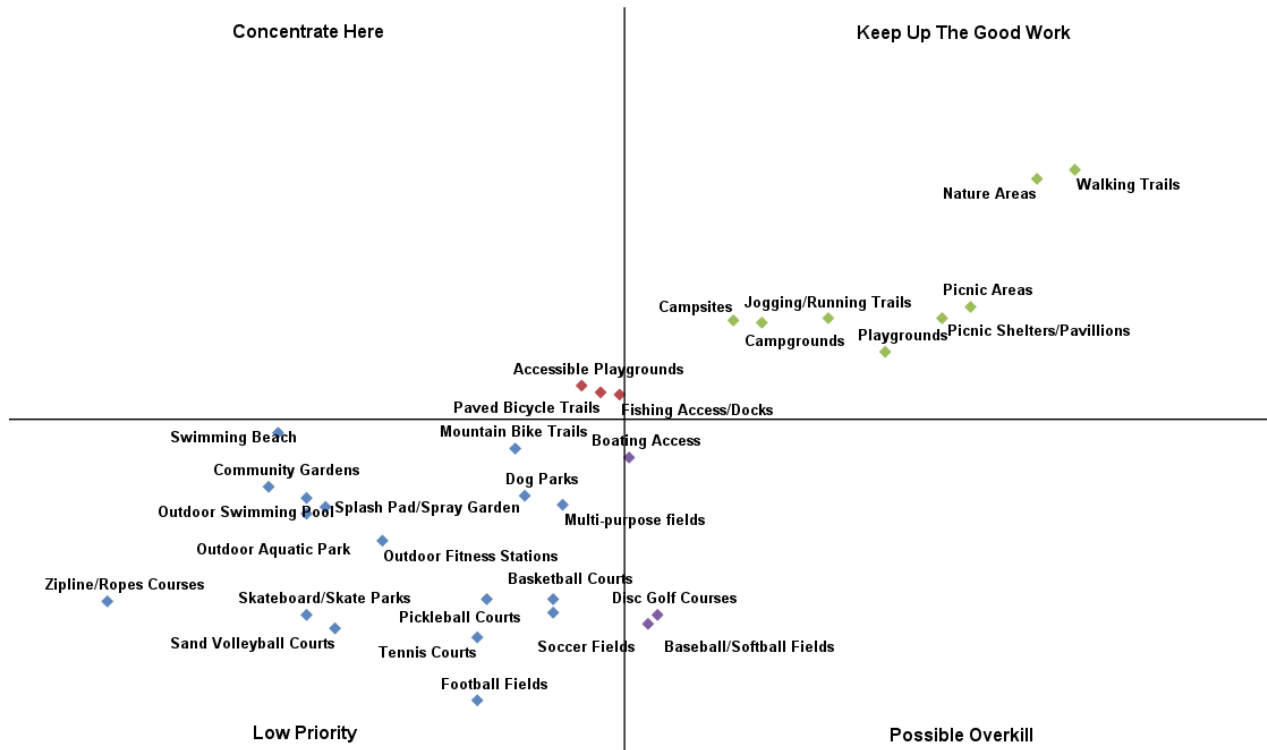
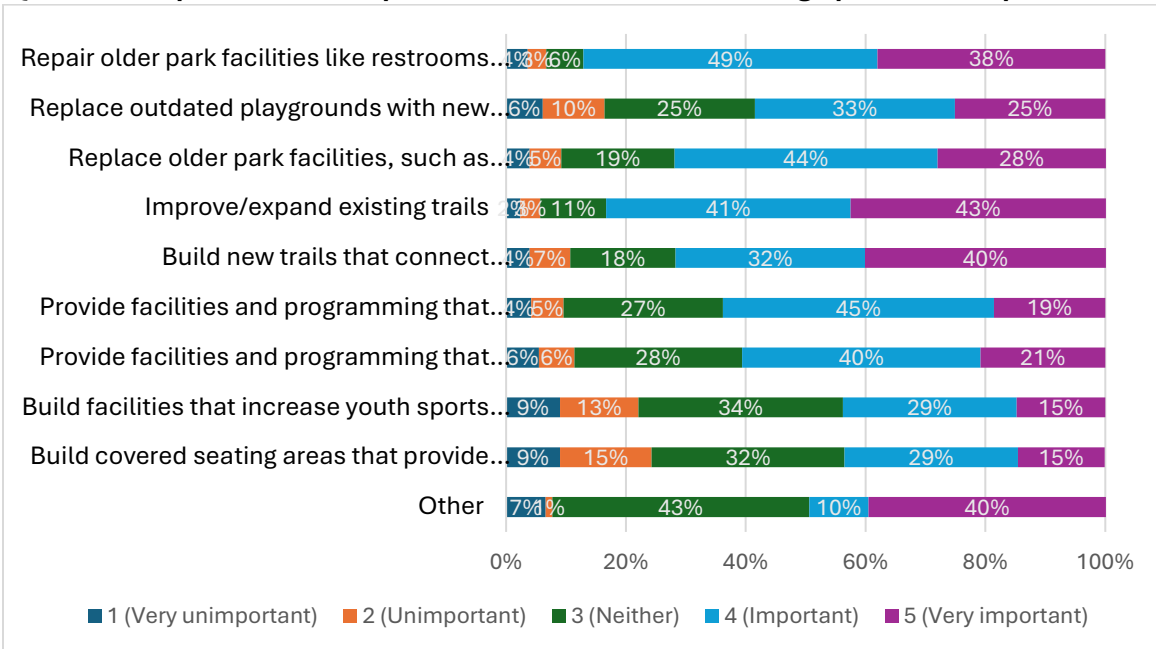


Chart 7: Resident Importance-Performance Analysis
Comparing Amenity Satisfaction and Importance Identified by Residents



* The grid was divided using the mean attribute importance score (3.50) and the mean attribute satisfaction score (3.38).

Chart 8: Resident Improvement Options for Outdoor Recreation Areas
Q13: How important or unimportant are each of the following options for improvement?



Recreation Provider Survey

A second component of the research conducted was a survey of local recreation providers. An online survey of parks and recreation departments, city administrators, and relevant personnel was conducted in March 2025. An email was sent to 1,283 potential respondents, with several follow-up email reminders. Of these, 55 email addresses bounced or were undeliverable, resulting in an effective sample of 1,228. The survey remained open for exactly three weeks and gathered 319 responses, resulting in a response rate of 26.0%. A copy of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix B and survey results are provided in Appendix D.

Most providers were **parks and recreation department directors (20.4%)**, **park superintendents/supervisors (14.5%)**, **city administrators/planners (13.8%)**, and other (19%) relevant personnel. Collectively, respondents served areas from over **199 unique ZIP codes** and **70 counties** throughout Missouri. About two-thirds (62.4%) of provider respondents reported serving a rural/small town geographic service area, another third (36.1%) reported a suburban area base, and the remainder (21.9%) reported an urban service area.

To assess the condition of park and outdoor recreation amenities, respondents were asked how much improvement each amenity requires on a scale from 1 (a lot of improvement needed) to 4 (no improvement needed). Respondents also had the option to select “not applicable” if the item did not pertain to them. The amenities most frequently identified as needing significant improvement were **accessible playgrounds (32.5%)**, **mountain bike trails (31.6%)**, and **paved bicycle trails (30.1%)**. Other facilities also rated as most in need of improvement include outdoor fitness stations, playgrounds in general, and community gardens. These results can be found in Chart 9.

In **rural communities**, the top five amenities needing the most improvement were:

- Mountain bike trails
- Outdoor fitness stations
- Walking trails
- Accessible playgrounds
- Playgrounds

In **suburban communities**, the top 5 amenities needing the most improvement were:

- Campgrounds
- Campsites
- Community gardens
- Accessible playgrounds
- Mountain bike trails

In **urban communities**, the top 5 amenities needing the most improvement were:

- Accessible playgrounds
- Mountain bike trails
- Playgrounds
- Walking trails
- Logging/running trails

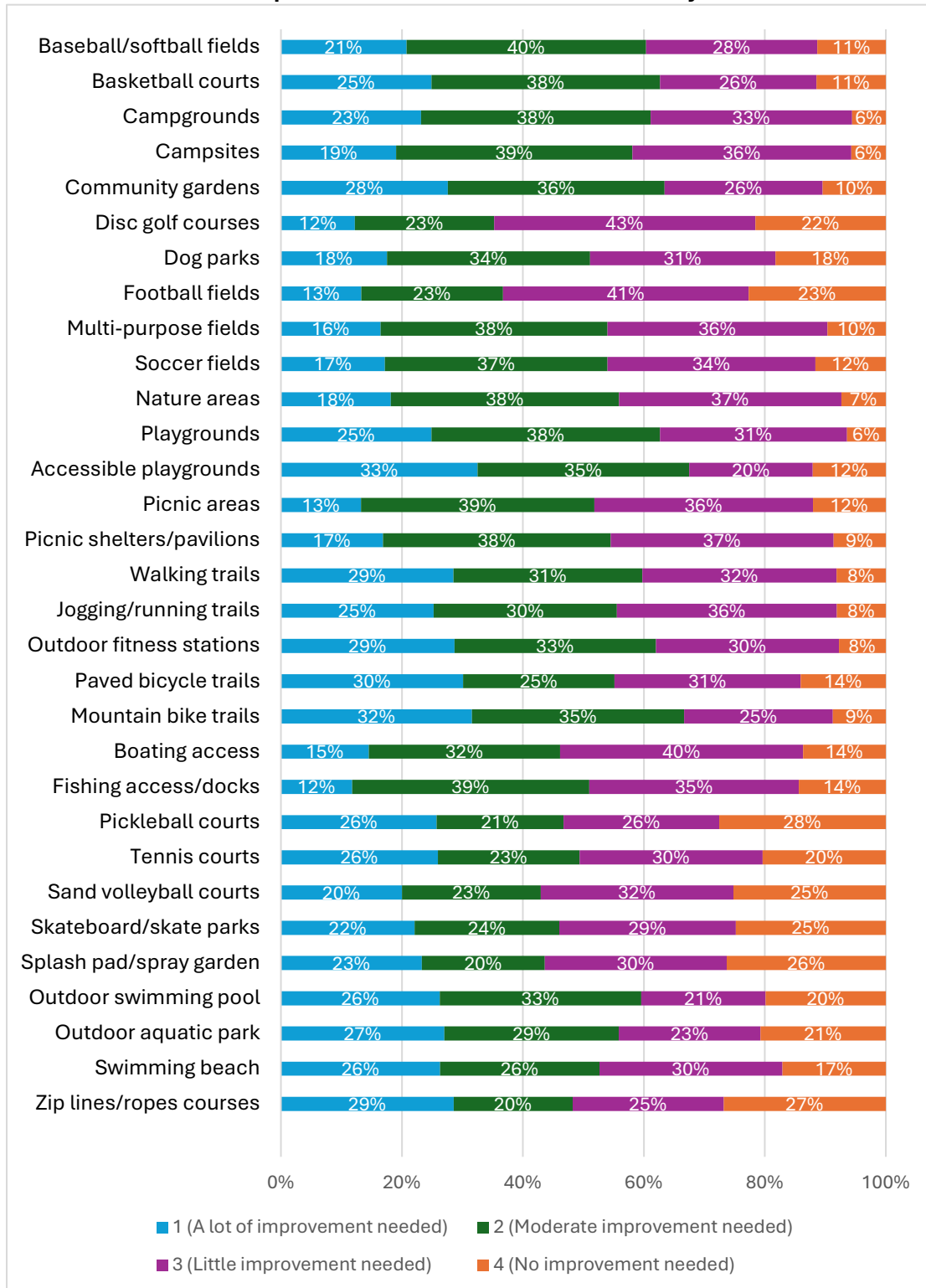
In an open-ended question, providers were asked to describe other amenities in their communities in need of improvement. Providers pointed out that **bathrooms** are most in need of improvement, followed by **community centers** and **lakes**, as shown in Figure 3.



Fig 3. Provider Other Amenities Needing Improvement

Chart 9: Provider Outdoor Recreation Amenity Improvement Needed

Q6: Thinking about the outdoor recreation amenities in your community, how much improvement is needed for each amenity



Respondents were also asked to rate trends in outdoor recreation amenity usage on a scale from 1 (decreasing a lot) to 5 (increasing a lot), with the option to select “not applicable” if the item did not pertain to them. As shown in Chart 10, the amenities with the highest increase in usage were **pickleball courts (67.1%), walking trails (39.1%), and jogging/running trails (37.4%)**. Amenities that were decreasing the most in usage were **community gardens (15.2%), tennis courts (10.5%), and sand volleyball courts (9.1%)**.

The top five amenities increasing in usage the most in **rural areas** were:

- Pickleball courts
- Jogging/running trails
- Walking trails
- Paved bicycle trails
- Disc golf courses

The top five amenities increasing in usage the most in **suburban areas** were:

- Pickleball courts
- Walking trails
- Jogging/running trails
- Mountain bike trails
- Accessible playgrounds

The top five amenities increasing in usage the most in **urban areas** were

- Pickleball courts
- Jogging/running trails
- Walking trails
- Mountain bike trails
- Paved bike trails

Providers were asked to list any other amenities or activities that they felt would gain in popularity over the next five years. The word cloud in Figure 4 captures their comments. The predominant activities listed were **pickleball**, followed by **trails** and **splashpads**. As these options were also in the original question (chart 10), this signals the significance of these activities for

providers. Beyond these, a wide range of other activities were identified.



Fig 4. Provider Other Amenities Gaining Popularity

An Importance-Performance Analysis was conducted to further explore which type of facilities the recreation providers feel are most in need of improvement and most likely to change in demand over the next five years. Based on these responses, each amenity was categorized into one of four quadrants: ‘Keep Up the Good Work’ (little improvement needed, increasing demand), ‘Low Priority’ (needs improvement, low demand), ‘Possible Overkill’ (little improvement needed, low demand), and ‘Concentrate Here’ (needs improvement, increasing demand). The grid was divided using the mean attribute improvement needs score (2.55) and the mean demand change score (3.49). The analysis shown in Chart 11 demonstrates that recreation providers feel **dog parks, splash pads and spray gardens, pickleball courts, and disc golf courses** are most in need of improvement and are expected to grow in demand in the next five years.

Respondents were also asked to rate their agency’s management priorities related to recreation on a scale from 1 (not a priority) to 4 (high priority). The top priority areas were **managing safety and risk in recreation areas (47.3%), promoting recreation opportunities (42.9%), and increasing the**

budget for annual operating expenses (40.6%), as shown in Chart 12. These

priorities were consistently ranked highest across rural, suburban, and urban areas.

Chart 10: Provider Usage of Outdoor Recreation Amenities

Q8: How much is each outdoor recreation amenity decreasing or increasing?

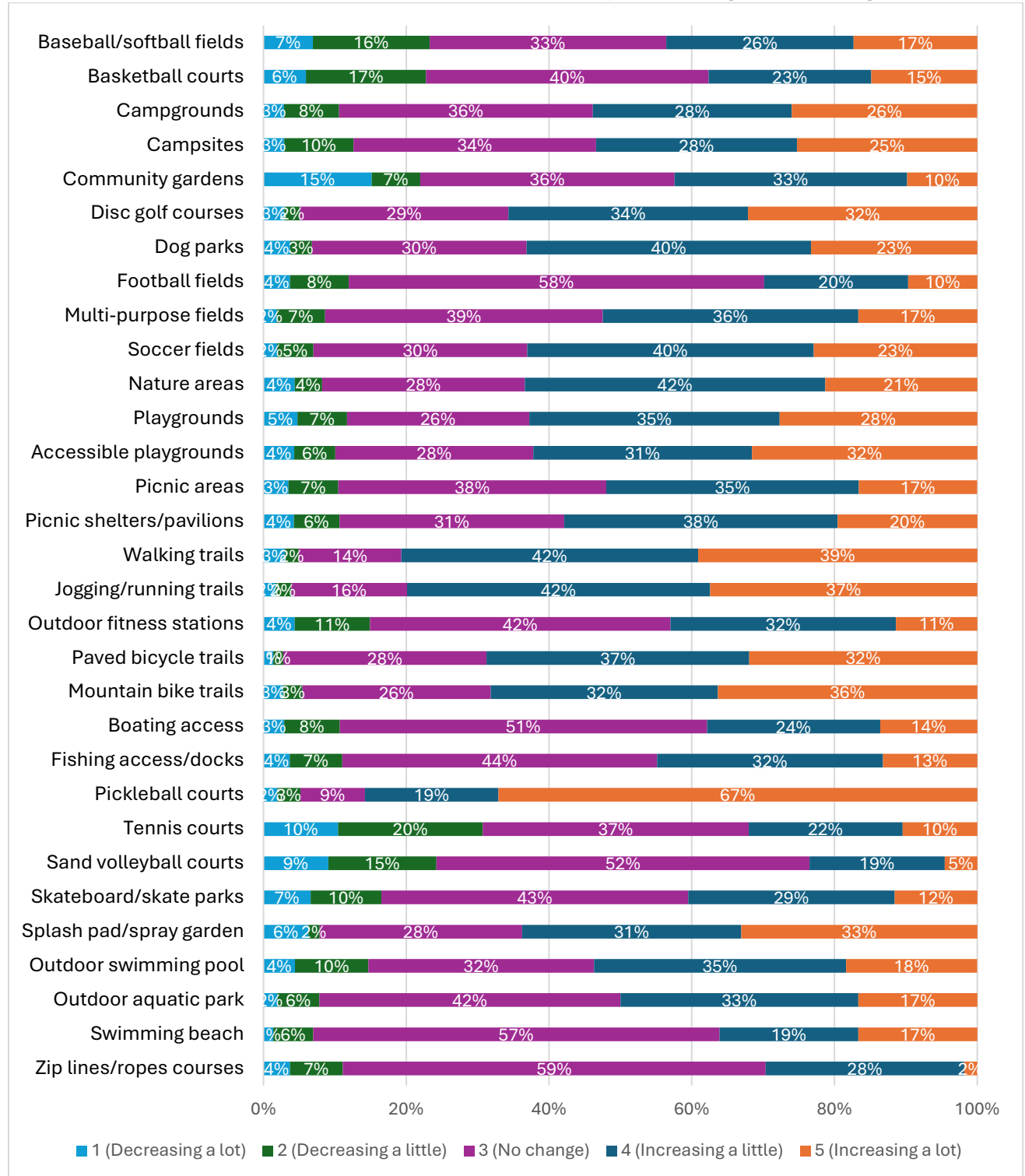
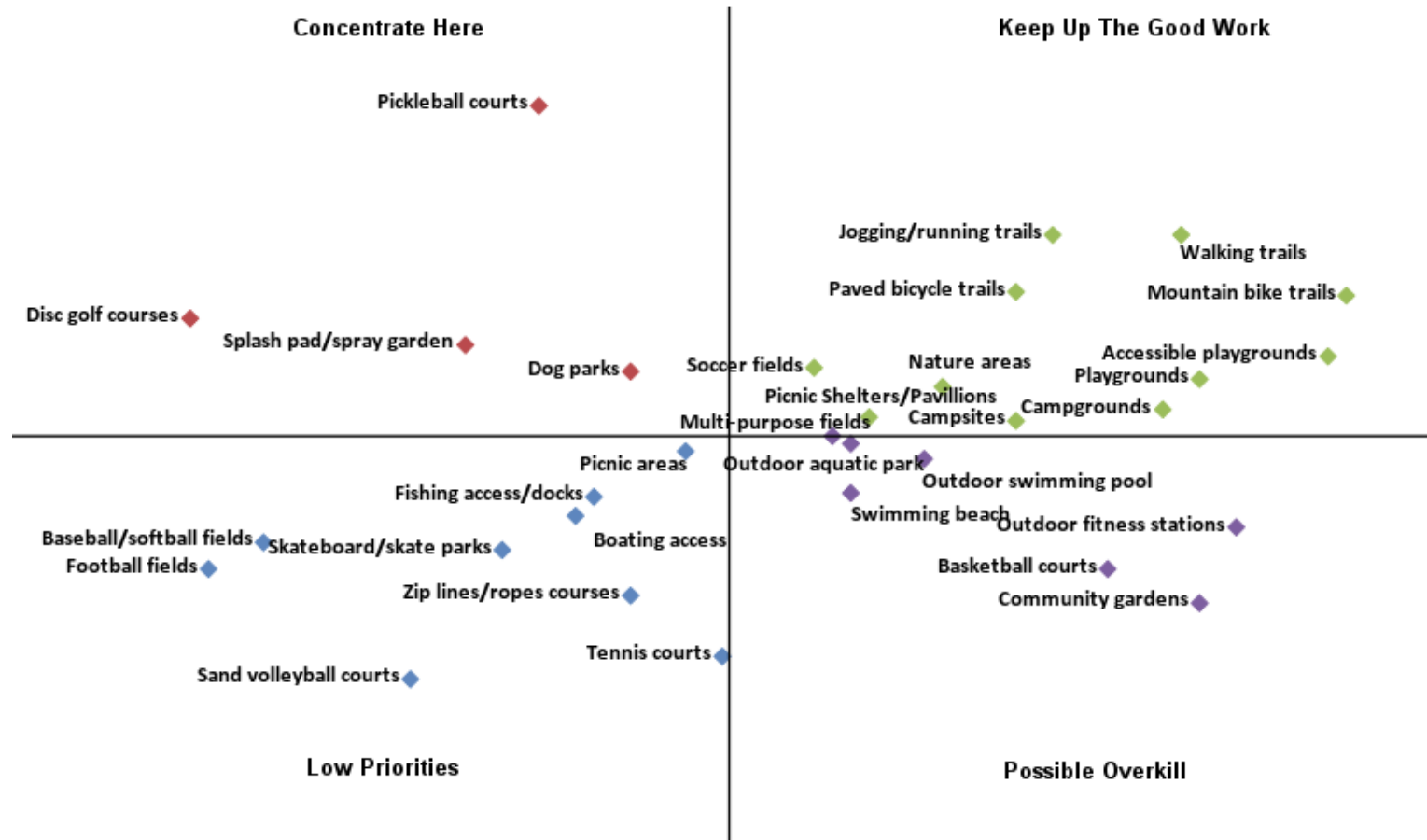


Chart 11: Provider Importance-Performance Analysis
Facility Improvement Needs by Demand Changes



* The grid was divided using the mean attribute improvement needs score (2.55) and the mean demand changes score (3.49).

Chart 12: Provider Management Priorities

Q10: How would you rate the following management priorities related to recreation for your agency?



Chart 13: Provider Meeting Age Group Needs

Q11. How would you rate your agency's ability in meeting the needs of the following age groups?

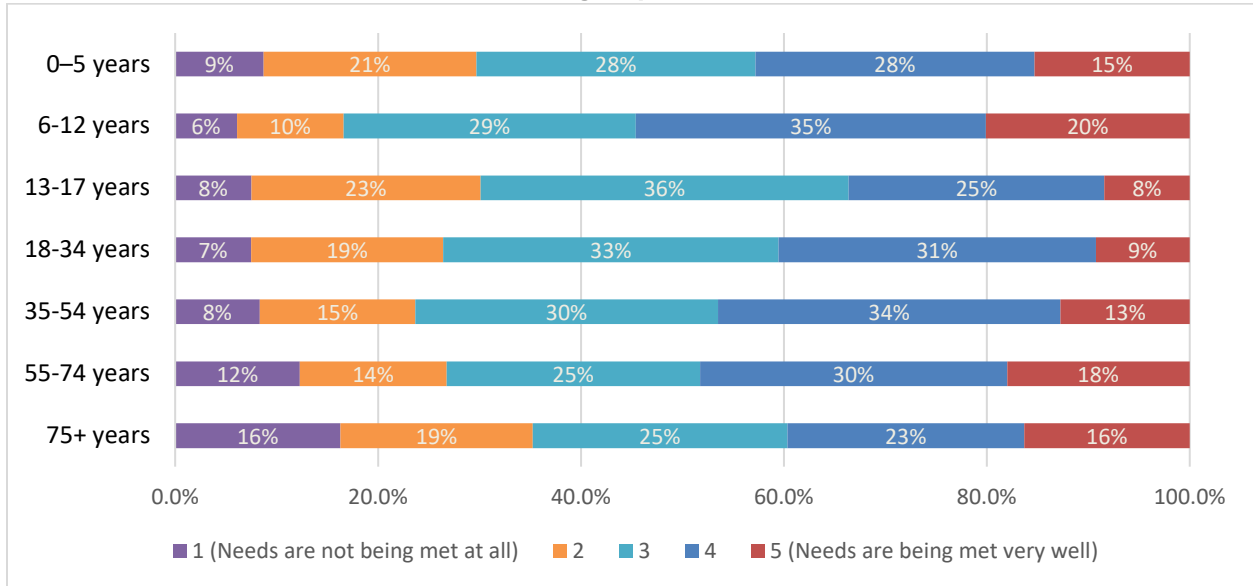
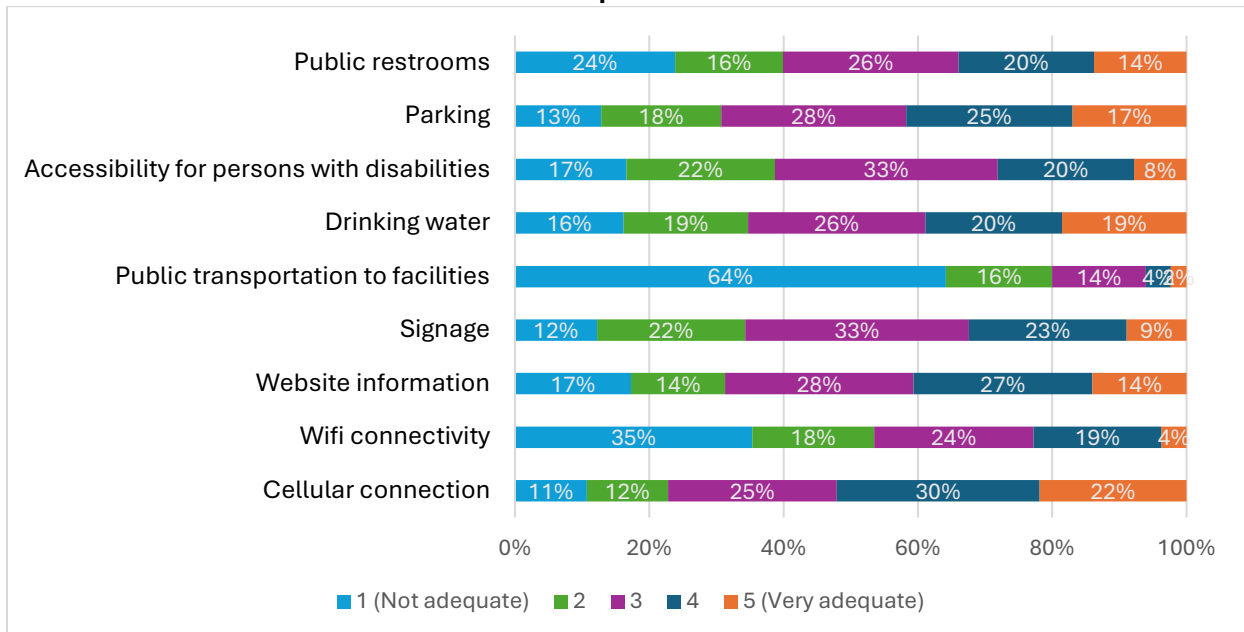


Chart 14: Provider Support Components Adequacy

Q14: How would you rate the adequacy of the following park and recreation support components?



Providers rated their agency's ability to meet the needs of specific age groups using a scale from 1 (needs are not being met at all) to 5 (needs are being met very well). As shown in Chart 13, providers reported they are **best meeting the needs of children aged 6-12** and **least meeting the needs of adults over age 75** and **teens aged 13-17**.

Next, in a series of open-ended questions, providers were asked to identify the two most popular recreation activities for each age group as well as for families. A summary of their most frequent responses is provided below:

- 0-5: playgrounds, splashpads, pool
- 6-12: playgrounds, basketball, youth sports
- 13-17: basketball, baseball, trails, sports fields, swimming
- 18-34: pickleball, trails, basketball
- 35-54: pickleball, trails, walking, fishing
- 55-74: pickleball, walking, trails
- 75+: trails, walking, pickleball, pavilions
- Families: trails, parks, playgrounds, sports fields, pools

Providers were then asked to rate the adequacy of various park and recreation support components on a scale of 1 (not adequate) to 5 (very adequate). The components rated least adequate were **public transportation to facilities (64.19%)**, **Wi-Fi connectivity (35.35%)**, and **public restrooms (23.85%)**. These were also identified as the least adequate in urban and suburban communities. In contrast, providers in rural communities identified accessibility for persons with disabilities, rather than public restrooms, as one of the most inadequate components. Chart 15 shows a full breakdown of these and other components.

Providers were also asked, in an open-ended question, to identify any other support components they felt were inadequate in their communities. As shown in Figure 5, providers again frequently noted **transportation**, followed by **lighting** and **bathrooms**. When focusing on the items not already provided in the previous question (chart 14), **lighting**, **playground equipment**, **bike racks**, and **concessions** emerge as common responses.



Fig 5. Provider Other Inadequate Support Components

In addition, providers were asked in an open-ended question to describe their agency's biggest strengths in providing park and recreation services for their communities. They highlighted **staff** and **greenspace** in their responses, captured in Figure 6.

Resident and Recreation Provider Survey Summary

The survey findings reveal strong alignment between residents and recreation providers on the value of numerous outdoor recreation facilities and amenities, particularly trails, but also highlight key areas where priorities diverge and where improvements are needed to meet current and future demands.

Residents reported high importance and satisfaction with walking trails, nature areas, and jogging/running trails. Providers noted that the most frequently used park features were pickleball courts, walking trails, and jogging/running trails, with consistent patterns across rural, urban, and suburban areas. This shared recognition of the importance of trail-based amenities suggests a recreation management approach that is responsive to user experiences and community preferences.

In terms of challenges, residents most commonly cited a lack of time due to competing commitments as limiting their use of parks and recreation areas. A smaller portion noted that local parks do not offer activities that match their interests, indicating a potential gap in program or facility offerings. Accessibility and safety were the most frequently mentioned concerns in residents' open-ended responses, underscoring the need for these issues to remain a priority. On the provider side, agencies identified funding, staffing, and ongoing maintenance as their most pressing challenges. These operational constraints directly affect the ability to improve amenities, expand offerings, and maintain existing infrastructure to meet community needs.

There is notable overlap between residents and recreation providers in identifying key areas for improvement, particularly bathrooms, accessible playgrounds, and

paved bicycle trails, which both groups cited as needing attention. Residents also expressed interest in rock climbing facilities, horseback riding trails, and fishing access/docks, which were not highlighted by providers, suggesting these may be under-recognized opportunities for expanding recreation offerings.

Conversely, providers emphasized pickleball courts, splash pads, dog parks, and disc golf courses as high priorities for both improvement and anticipated growth. However, residents rated pickleball and disc golf as lower priorities, with disc golf landing in the "possible overkill" category of the resident Importance-Performance Analysis. These findings underscore the value of continued dialogue between residents and providers to ensure resources meet public needs while anticipating future trends.

Taken together, these findings provide a data-informed foundation for identifying the goals and priorities presented in the next section.



GOALS & PRIORITIES

The primary purpose of the *Show-Me Missouri Outdoors* plan is to assess statewide recreation needs and establish a mechanism for awarding LWCF grants to communities with unmet needs. In addition, the research conducted as a part of the planning process also addressed broader issues, including public health, demographic shifts, economic sustainability, and support for underserved communities.

Drawing on findings from the resident and recreation provider surveys, as well as the 2018-2022 SCORP, the research team identified eight overarching goals. These goals, along with their related objectives, are designed to guide public recreation providers and other stakeholders in meeting Missouri's future recreation needs. Many of these goals and objectives will be incorporated into the Open Project Selection Process, the annual method by which potential outdoor recreation projects are selected for the LWCF grants.

Goal 1:

Expand recreational opportunities that serve the diverse needs of all user types, generations, and communities across Missouri.

- **Objective 1.1** – Increase the number and geographic distribution of inclusive recreation facilities that support physical, cognitive, sensory, communicative, and emotional development for users, including individuals with physical and developmental disabilities.
- **Objective 1.2** – Prioritize investments in areas of need, such as those facing significant health challenges (e.g., heart disease, obesity, diabetes, mental distress) and income disparities (e.g., higher rates of childhood poverty).
- **Objective 1.3** – Support the development and maintenance of facilities for both traditional (e.g., hiking, camping, fishing) and emerging (e.g., pickleball, splash pads) recreational activities to serve the widest possible range of users.
- **Objective 1.4** – Develop public recreation

opportunities that encourage social interaction and provide community gathering spaces, such as community gardens, farmers markets, dog parks, and outdoor concert venues.

- **Objective 1.5** – Develop facilities and programs that appeal to and emphasize youth participation, particularly teens, and that provide a sense of freedom and adventure.
- **Objective 1.6** – Establish facilities and programming that appeal to older adults and facilitate social interaction, enable participation in low-impact physical activities like pickleball, and stimulate mental acuity.
- **Objective 1.7** – Improve access to recreation areas by expanding public transportation options and enhancing internet connectivity (e.g., Wi-Fi) where appropriate.
- **Objective 1.8** – Make sure that park and recreation facilities are safe, accessible, and well-maintained through renovating or constructing public restrooms and shelters, addressing deferred maintenance, and integrating safety and risk management principles into facility design, upkeep, and programming.

Goal 2:

Expand Missouri's trail system and promote trails as essential to active and healthy living.

- **Objective 2.1** – Prioritize RTP funding for trail projects that close trail gaps across Missouri.
- **Objective 2.2** – Invest in diverse trail types (e.g., walking, jogging, paved bicycle, nature, mountain biking) to meet a range of user preferences.
- **Objective 2.3** – Establish trails that connect to parks, downtown areas and business districts, schools, and neighborhoods. Prioritize RTP funding for

trails that act as connectors.

- **Objective 2.4** – Develop common messaging that emphasizes the economic benefit of trails, particularly those that draw users into business and downtown districts. By “selling” the economic importance of trails, especially to businesses, grant applicants are better able to secure a grant match.
- **Objective 2.5** – Expand the state's water trail system and emphasize the connection between public lands. Prioritize RTP funding for the development of water trails.
- **Objective 2.6** – Integrate active fitness elements such as fitness stations or race-ready trail segments (e.g., 5Ks) into trail planning. Prioritize RTP funding for trail projects that integrate active elements.
- **Objective 2.7** – Leverage RTP funding for projects to upgrade existing trails to meet ADA standards and improve overall trail safety and usability.

Goal 3:

Use LWCF grants to modernize facilities, enhance security, and support long-term project sustainability.

- **Objective 3.1** – Prioritize LWCF grant funding for projects that upgrade existing park and recreation facilities and infrastructure to meet ADA standards.
- **Objective 3.2** – Prioritize LWCF grant funding to replace obsolete facilities and address safety and security issues, particularly at previous LWCF sites.
- **Objective 3.3** – Give precedence to grant proposals that emphasize adequate funding and staffing for long-term maintenance of projects.
- **Objective 3.4** – Emphasize support facilities and infrastructure, such as restrooms, parking lots, and sidewalks, recognizing that the need for these types

of facilities is equally great in order to ensure access to all.

- **Objective 3.5** – Encourage cost-savings and operational efficiency by highlighting LWCF grant proposals that incorporate multi-use spaces or facilities that can accommodate multiple uses, or that incorporate facilities that have a smaller footprint and require less infrastructure and maintenance.
- **Objective 3.6** – Focus LWCF grant funding on proposals that incorporate stormwater retention ponds, create or acquire wetlands in flood-prone areas, or implement other flood control practices that also provide recreation opportunities.
- **Objective 3.7** – Prioritize LWCF grant funding for projects that include landscaping with native species and methods for minimizing the spread of invasive species, as well as projects that preserve or create wildlife habitat and other natural environments.
- **Objective 3.8** – Emphasize projects that use recycled materials or install permeable surfaces; projects that incorporate energy-efficient mechanisms such as timers or sensors; and projects that integrate renewable energy sources, such as solar or geothermal.
- **Objective 3.9** – Prioritize projects that contribute to neighborhood stabilization by reusing or revitalizing brownfields, FEMA disaster sites, or other underused land (e.g., infill development).

Goal 4:

Connect youth to the outdoors through environmental education, stewardship, and hands-on learning.

- **Objective 4.1** – Partner with colleges and universities to provide students classroom experience in developing park master plans, needs assessments, and

feasibility studies, as well as special event planning. Students gain experience and classroom credit while exploring future employment opportunities.

- **Objective 4.2** – Develop youth volunteer and stewardship programming to foster youth ownership of local parks. Work with school clubs and school organizations such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), National Honor Society (NHS), and National Beta chapters to identify service projects that fulfill required volunteer hours.
- **Objective 4.3** – Incorporate natural and cultural history, as well as other core curriculum competencies, on interpretive signs in parks and along trails. Doing so will assist schools with justifying student field trips to outdoor places.
- **Objective 4.4** – Collaborate with vocational schools on construction and development projects, providing hands-on trade experience and allowing students to earn classroom credit.
- **Objective 4.5** – Encourage teens to participate in the planning and design process for developing new parks or facilities, and give higher priority to LWCF grant proposals that include teens in the planning and input phases.
- **Objective 4.6** – Work with the DESE and public recreation providers to develop an online resource listing outdoor recreation learning opportunities so that schools and other youth organizations can more readily identify area outdoor facilities and activities that can be incorporated into curricula.

Goal 5:

Promote the health and community benefits of the outdoors through partnerships, messaging, and programming.

- **Objective 5.1** – Partner with public agencies, nonprofits, retailers, and other outdoor advocates to host regional or statewide outdoor events, such as the WOW National Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Schools (<http://wondersofwildlife.org/education/wow-school>).
- **Objective 5.2** – Partner with community, regional, and transportation planners to identify sidewalks, bike lanes, and alternative transportation corridors needed to connect residents to parks, and facilitate greater walkability/bikeability within communities.
- **Objective 5.3** – Develop messaging and educational materials that demonstrate the importance of park and recreation facilities as essential community services for distribution to health care professionals, social service providers, insurance companies, community planners, and state and local officials.
- **Objective 5.4** – Coordinate with community and county health care providers to develop park- and trail-specific prescription programs that encourage use of local parks and trails for health and fitness activities.
- **Objective 5.5** – Host statewide workshops with public recreation providers and health care professionals to explore opportunities for partnering on health initiatives and improving community health and wellness through physical activity and identify potential sources of health care funding that could be leveraged as match for LWCF grants.

- **Objective 5.6** – Develop partnerships with local businesses, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions, and healthcare providers to expand recreation offerings, leverage resources, and reach broader populations.
- **Objective 5.7** – Collaborate across jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., city-county, county-state) to create interconnected trail systems, shared facilities, and regional recreation initiatives.
- **Objective 5.8** – Explore and pilot appropriate technology solutions to enhance the user experience (e.g., information access, reservations), streamline management, and improve data collection within recreation areas.
- **Objective 5.9** – Increase public awareness of the mental health, physical health, and social benefits of outdoor recreation, reinforcing the primary motivations cited by residents for engaging in these activities.

Goal 6:

Promote the conservation and stewardship of natural and cultural resources within recreation areas.

- **Objective 6.1** – Integrate conservation principles and best management practices into the planning, development, and maintenance of all recreation areas to protect biodiversity and sensitive habitats.
- **Objective 6.2** – Enhance efforts to identify, preserve, and interpret significant historical and cultural resources located within park and recreation lands.
- **Objective 6.3** – Promote environmental education and stewardship opportunities for park visitors to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of

Missouri's natural and cultural heritage.

- **Objective 6.4** – Implement strategies to manage and mitigate the impact of invasive species and other environmental threats within recreation areas.

Goal 7:

Build provider capacity through funding, staffing, and workforce development to support sustainable outdoor recreation.

- **Objective 7.1** – Establish a statewide grants coalition that includes public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders, to identify and advertise sources of public and private grant funding and sources of match and cost-sharing for outdoor recreation.
- **Objective 7.2** – Develop an online clearinghouse of public and private funding sources for outdoor recreation development and programming.
- **Objective 7.3** – Pursue diverse and sustainable funding sources to support operations, facility development, maintenance, and staffing needs, to address the financial challenges reported by recreation providers.
- **Objective 7.4** – Provide technical assistance to grant applicants by coordinating with other funding providers to host grant-writing workshops around the state.
- **Objective 7.5** – Develop and implement

strategies to recruit, train, and retain qualified staff and volunteers for managing recreation facilities and programs.

Goal 8:

Continue data collection, research efforts, and spatial analysis to identify areas of greatest recreation need.

- **Objective 8.1** – Partner with agencies such as the DHSS and exploreMOhealth (<https://exploreMOhealth.org/>) to conduct community health and community needs assessments.
- **Objective 8.2** – Develop GIS gap analysis mapping that identifies communities and neighborhoods lacking in local outdoor recreation opportunities or communities and neighborhoods with high health risk factors.
- **Objective 8.3** – Continue research efforts to understand local communities' recreation needs, use patterns, and constraints for participation.
- **Objective 8.4** – Establish and maintain consistent mechanisms for gathering input from residents to ensure recreation development directly aligns with evolving community needs, preferences, and satisfaction levels.
- **Objective 8.5** – Continue to use data from resident and provider surveys to inform resource allocation, prioritize improvements, and anticipate future recreation trends effectively.